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HEROES OF
AMERICAN HISTORY

PONCE DE LEON



JUAN PONCE DE LEON

JUAN PONCE DE LEON

BY
FREDERICK A. OBER

HEROES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

ILLUSTRATED



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AUTHORITIES

There is no good *Life* of Juan Ponce de Leon extant, and the writer has been compelled to pursue his subject through several works, historical in nature, dealing with the times in which he lived, but affording scant material for a biography. Such authors as Herrera, Oviedo, Peter Martyr, Gomara, Barcia, and Las Casas have yielded something, however, and the various fragments have been pieced together, recourse also being had to other books on early Spanish discoveries. The author's researches in the West Indies were not unfruitful, for he has visited both Santo Domingo and Porto Rico several times, as well as investigated in Guadeloupe and other islands of the Lesser Antilles.

Of all the Spanish writers, Barcia is the fullest in details respecting Ponce de Leon. His work is entitled *Ensayo Cronologico para la Historia General de la Florida*. It was put forth as from the pen of "Don Gabriel de Cardenas," though really written by Don Andres Gonzales Barcia, and published in Madrid, 1723.

Barcia based his narratives referring to De Leon upon material found in the History by Herrera, who, he says, had access to the letters which Juan Ponce wrote to the Emperor Charles V., Cardinal Adrian, and others. (Decade 3, Lib. I., Cap. 14): "... Antonio de Herrera comprueba esta Cronologia con las cartas de el mismo Juan Ponce, escritas al Emperador Carlos V., al Cardinal Adriano, y otros."

All the sources on Ponce de Leon are mentioned in Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History*, and to them the reader is respectfully referred, with the caution, however, to be prepared for a long and perhaps wearisome search.

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I

THE VALIANT EXEMPLAR

1443-1482

THAT great deeds and a broad field of action are not always commensurate is exemplified in the lives of the Ponces de Leon, Juan and Rodrigo, noteworthy names of a family famed in the annals of America and Spain. Of the two, doubtless the latter was the more distinguished in the land of his birth for bravery and military skill; but the former achieved a still wider celebrity by linking his name with the discovery of Florida and the search for the fountain of youth.

These two famous sons of Spain were not closely related, although they bore the same patronymic, as Juan came from an ancient

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family of Aragon, and Rodrigo from an equally ancient, and in the fifteenth century more flourishing, house of Andalusia, or the south of Spain. Both belonged to the *hidalguia*, or Spanish nobility; but the northern, or Aragon branch, was in decadence at the time Juan was born, in or about the year 1460, while the Andalusian was then rapidly approaching the zenith of its glory. This, indeed, culminated with the career of Rodrigo Ponce de Leon (born 1443, died 1492), who, while possessing vast territory in Spain, with scores of castles, towns, and villages, passed the greater part of his life in camp.

Soldiers were they both, trained almost from infancy in the profession of arms; but while Juan was still a page at the court of Pero Nuñez de Guzman, Señor of Toral, Rodrigo could raise an army of his own retainers and vassals. For he was then the most illustrious of the Ponces, and, having in youth come into the ownership of title and estates, was well and widely known as the powerful Marquis of Cadiz. As his territory, at the time this story opens, lay contiguous to the region then occupied by the Moors, with whom for centuries the Spaniards had

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been engaged in deadly warfare, he had been, as it were, cradled beneath the canopies of tents, nurtured upon the traditions of his ancestors, and matured with Spain's seasoned veterans in the field. Thus it came to pass that he was regarded by the king and the queen, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, as their most doughty champion, defender of the faith, and implacable antagonist of the Mahometan Moors.

For more than seven centuries the Moors from Africa had held possession of some portion of the Iberian peninsula; but at the period in which Juan and Rodrigo Ponce de Leon appeared upon the scene they were restricted to a mountainous region bordering upon the Mediterranean Sea. A thousand years ago, indeed, the Mahometans had taken as their own the best part of Spain; they had even crossed the French frontier and threatened to invade all Europe. Turned about by the blows of Charles Martel, in that fierce battle of the year 732, the Saracens began their century-long retreat southward; but nearly five hundred years elapsed before their power was shattered on the field of Tolosa. After that the Spaniards gathered courage to attack the Moors at every oppor-

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tunity; still, it was not till the end of the fifteenth century that they were practically driven from Spain. The reflux wave to Africa was a very long time in reaching its shores.

It remained for Isabella and Ferdinand to reap the reward of persistent effort by other sovereigns through the centuries preceding. They fell heirs to what had been accomplished, what had been garnered, what achieved by their predecessors, and by their union they welded together the chain of little kingdoms—of Spanish provinces—that stretched across the peninsula from the Mediterranean to Portugal's frontiers. Behind the retreating Moors the Spaniards erected impregnable barriers: one year they took and refortified a city, another a province, a mountain range, a river and its banks; but whatever was taken they held. Broader and broader became the region that lay north of the Moors, from which they were banished forever; narrower and narrower the territory that lay between it and the Mediterranean, until, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, they held only the Sierra Nevada and the country skirting it. But this territory comprised the most fertile,

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the most beautiful region of Spain, where the climate was perfect, the scenery perfection. Trickling rivulets from the Nevadas, or Snowy Mountains, fed sparkling streams that descended through picturesque valleys, nourishing an exuberant vegetation which supported a large population without toil-some effort on their part.

The Moors were still numerous in that portion of Spain to which the exigencies of war had driven their ancestors; they were yet fierce and warlike, and now and again, like hawks swooping from their aeries, they descended from their mountain valleys and ravished Christian territory. But they could make no head against the encroachments of the Spaniards, and were fortunate if they could hold what they had: the towns and villages embosomed within rock-walled valleys; cities like Loja and Granada, with beautiful mosques and teeming market-places; castles like the Alhambra, with its impregnable fortifications girdling the Hill of the Sun, that towered above the "city of the faithful" in Spain.

Within the Alhambra, at the opening of the year 1580, dwelt the powerful Moorish sovereign Muley Aben Hassan, who had

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succeeded to the throne in 1465. Granada was his capital, the glorious Alhambra his palace of delights, while his sway extended over sixscore fortified cities and towns. Still, he was expected by the Christian sovereigns to pay them annual tribute, in default of which his territory was subject to invasion. He had not paid it, then, these many years; but only a few months before King Ferdinand had sent an embassy with a demand for the tribute, in money and captives, which was customary in the time of Muley's father, Ismael. The embassy was received with courtesy, and sumptuously entertained in the palace of the Alhambra, but when Muley Hassan heard the message he is said to have returned the haughty answer: "The kings of Granada who used to pay tribute to the Castilians are dead—tell your sovereigns. Our mints coin now nothing but lance-heads and scimitar-blades; but these are at their service!"

An armed truce had existed for years between the Spaniards and the Moors, but, as was perfectly apparent to both Mahometans and Christians, a crucial conflict in the very near future was inevitable. The insolent reply of the Moorish king rendered it so,

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even if existing conditions had not; but at the time King Ferdinand was unable to proceed against his mortal enemy, owing to a war with Portugal and dissensions in his kingdom. Muley Hassan was very well aware of this fact, else he might not have proceeded so far as, in effect, to throw the gauntlet at his rival's feet. It was too late to retreat, even though too early to begin a war; but he deliberately chose the dread alternative, and cast the die that determined his fate and doomed his people to destruction.

Taking advantage of King Ferdinand's preoccupation in Portugal, the wily Muley Hassan suddenly descended upon Zahara, a Spanish post on his western frontier. In itself, Zahara was not a very desirable acquisition; but its castle-fortress, perched as it was upon a great cliff overlooking a fertile stretch of Spanish territory, gave it vast strategic importance. One stormy winter's night, in Christmas week of 1481, a band of Moorish soldiery scaled the battlements and fell upon the unsuspecting garrison as if from the clouds. The long period of peace had rendered the Spaniards negligent, and the fierce tempest had driven the senti-

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nels to shelter, so that the Moors took them entirely by surprise. Aroused from their slumbers by fiendish yells and war-cries, the soldiers of the garrison rushed to arms; but only to be cut down by Moorish scimitars, and in a short time the fortress was in possession of the foe. With its fall also fell the town of which it was the citadel, and the wretched inhabitants, assembled in the great square by call of trumpet, were quickly made captive, and at daybreak driven off in gangs to Granada. After garrisoning the fortress with his own soldiers, and placing it in a posture of defence, Muley Hassan returned to his capital, flushed with victory, and carrying an immense amount of spoil.

When King Ferdinand heard of this exploit his rage was great, his indignation intense; for, though he himself was merely biding the time to strike a telling blow at his adversary, he did not relish the idea of being forestalled. Still, the Moor had done for him what all his diplomacy had thus far failed to accomplish: he had united, at a stroke, the various factions of the Spanish nobility, who came pouring into camp with offers of immediate assistance.

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Now, while the king believed in fighting fire with fire, as the Spanish proverb has it—*Sacar fuego con otro fuego* (quenching one fire with another)—he was not then in position to act. He was laying his plans for an invasion of Moorish territory on such a scale that, once undertaken, not merely detached outposts should be reduced, but eventually the entire kingdom. He was already assembling the forces of Spain for a siege that was eventually protracted over ten years' time, and he must necessarily proceed cautiously and slowly, taking one sure step at a time.

It was at this juncture, while the king was planning moves of magnitude on the martial chess-board, which he was fearful of deranging by a petty play, yet burning with a desire for revenge upon his foe for the taking of Zahara, that the Marquis of Cadiz came to the rescue. By a sudden foray into the enemy's territory, and by a feat of arms unsurpassed in any age for dash and gallantry, he relieved the situation by a slash of his sword, and gratified his sovereign's longing for revenge.

His dukedom comprised vast possessions in Andalusia contiguous to the Moorish

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provinces, and in his service he held many converted Moors as scouts, or *adalides*, who spied upon the movements of their countrymen and reported to their master what was going on. They informed him one day that if he wished to make reprisals upon Muley Hassan a golden opportunity offered in the surprising of Alhama, a town and fortress situated similarly to Zahara, near the frontier, and occupying cragged heights partially surrounded by a river. The valiant marquis desired nothing so much as a chance to signalize himself in the interests of his sovereigns, and at once, upon receipt of the information, despatched his trusty retainer, Ortega de Prado, a captain of *escaladors*, to survey the fortress and report upon the practicability of carrying it by storm. He did so one dark night, and returned with the report that Alhama was negligently guarded, and that its walls, though lofty and steep, could probably be scaled.

Then Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, Marquis of Cadiz, collected three thousand cavalry and four thousand infantry, nearly all his own retainers, and on a day in February, 1482, set out for Alhama. His troops were vete-

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rans, inured to war from their frequent encounters with the Moors. Upon being told that the object of the foray was the reduction of Alhama and the avenging of the Zahareños, they demanded to be led at once to the assault. All were brave men, without fear of death; but the marquis would not needlessly expose them, so, although they could then see the town and fortress from their hiding-places in the sierra, he waited till the shades of night had fallen. Then they approached the castle on the crag, arriving near the base of which three hundred picked men were selected for its assault, while the main body of the army remained in ambush.

Two or three hours before daylight, Ortega de Prado and his thirty escaladors planted their ladders against the walls, and up the gallant three hundred clambered to the battlements. Over the parapet they poured, and had gained the portal to the citadel before they were discovered. As the Moorish soldiers came forth they were slaughtered without mercy, and soon the uproar within reached the army without, which joined in with loud shouts and the din of kettle-drum and trumpet. A postern-gate

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was thrown open by the brave Prado, and in rushed the Christians, led by the Marquis of Cadiz and the *Adelantado* of Andalusia.

The Moors fought valiantly, as heaps of slain attested, the Christian losses including two *alcaldes* and many followers; but all their spirited defence was in vain. Soon the castle was in possession of the Spaniards, and with it fell the town; though not until after a protracted defence, for it was also surrounded by high walls, which the Spaniards were compelled to scale by means of their ladders, and even then did not carry until after a breach had been opened by their artillery. After the walls were gained the Moors fought desperately from rooftops, thresholds, and hearth-stones; for they knew no mercy would be shown them, and that all survivors, women and children as well as men, would be carried away as captives and immured in dungeons or sold as slaves. They were finally overcome, and while the groans of the wounded and laments of prisoners filled the air, the Spanish soldiery gave themselves up to the sacking of the town. Vast booty was obtained, consisting of gold and silver, cattle, horses, silks, grain, and honey; for Alhama was

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called the richest town in Muley Hassan's kingdom, and was a repository for rents and tribute-money.

Believing that town and castle were to be abandoned, the soldiery committed great destruction of portable property, and wasted provisions which they should have saved; but the marquis had no intention of loosing his hold on this erstwhile stronghold of the Moors.

"Nay, nay," he said. "God hath given the place into our hands. We have gained it with difficulty and bloodshed; it would be a stain upon our honor to abandon it through fear of imaginary dangers."

So preparations were made to hold both town and castle. The baggage of the army, which had been left on the bank of a river, was sent for, the breaches in the walls were repaired, and everything made ready for a siege; for the marquis well knew that Muley Hassan had received tidings of what had befallen his stronghold, and he knew, also, that the fiery Moor would lose no time in hastening hither with an army. Within three days, in truth, he was before the walls with fifty thousand horse and foot, and finding them impregnable, though his fanatical followers attempted to scale them again

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and again, he sat down for a siege until his artillery should arrive. The Christians within the walls had food enough, but little water, for the Moors succeeded in diverting a stream that ran through the town, and the besieged came near perishing from thirst.

Information of their perilous situation was conveyed by fleet messengers to the king and the queen, who were then at a distance from Andalusia; also to the several petty lords of the southern country, who, like the Marquis of Cadiz, could muster little armies of their own. At once there was a great commotion throughout all southern Spain, and the most energetic of the nobles was Don Juan de Guzman, Duke of Medina Sidonia, equally powerful with the Marquis of Cadiz, but hitherto his deadly enemy. Won over by the Marquesa Ponce, who entreated him to go to her husband's assistance, he associated other cavaliers with him, and in a short time a large army was marching upon Alhama. Another army was being raised under the direct command of the king, and information of this coming to the ears of Muley Hassan, he exerted himself to the utmost to carry the castle by storm before the reinforcements should arrive.

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His escaladors mounted the walls by hundreds, only to be thrown headlong back into the ravines; but by means of a secret passage some seventy fierce Africans gained access to the citadel before they were discovered and attacked by the garrison. A most desperate engagement ensued, but the Moors were finally overwhelmed by superior numbers and the last Moslem cut down. The banner of the prophet, which they had defended so valiantly, was then displayed from the ramparts, while seventy turbaned heads were thrown over the walls to dismay the besiegers.

At sight of the captured banner and the dissevered heads, Muley Hassan went wild with rage; but he was unable then to avenge his valiant followers, for close upon him now were pressing the forces of Medina Sidonia. Compelled to retreat, back to Granada he hastened, and into the castle poured Don Rodrigo's rescuers, ere the last Moorish banner had disappeared behind the hills. Thus Alhama, which was won by Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, and rescued by his life-long foe the Duke of Medina Sidonia, continued in Spanish possession and has ever since remained.

II

FIGHTING THE MOORS

1483-1492

ALTHOUGH the Marquis of Cadiz, by his inconsiderate attack upon Alhama, had precipitated the war which his sovereign would fain have delayed another year or two, still, as he and the Duke of Medina Sidonia had borne the brunt of the fighting, and sustained themselves in the captured fortress until Muley Hassan had been driven away, King Ferdinand regarded them now with greater favor than ever. They divided the laurels between them; and it was not the least of the rich results of this independent foray, in the opinion of the king, that these hitherto implacable enemies should have become reconciled, and thereafter marched forth shoulder to shoulder.

It was not to be expected that the Moors would take their defeat with good grace, although Alhama was but a fair exchange for

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Zahara, and not a long time elapsed before the agile Muley Hassan made a ravage of Medina Sidonia, which resulted in the loss to the duke of many followers and great herds of cattle. As the Moors were retreating upon Malaga, however, they were attacked by a gallant captain in the service of Rodrigo Ponce, and lost a large number out of the *cavalgada*, or herd, which they had collected, besides some of their bravest cavaliers. King Muley was greatly incensed; but he would not engage with his main body in conflict, for, as he sagaciously said, after viewing the field: "A handful of troops acquainted with the wild passes of these mountains might well be able to destroy an army encumbered as ours is with booty. Allah preserve us from these hard riders of Xeres!"

Thousands of cattle and horses were allowed to escape in the defiles of the mountains, but other thousands were driven in triumph to Malaga, and on the whole the foray was a great success for the Moors. In retaliation therefor the Marquis of Cadiz resolved upon a counter-foray into Moorish territory. He associated with him such gallant cavaliers as the Adelantado of Andalusia, the Count of Cifuentes, the Master of

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Santiago, and valiant Don Alonzo de Aguilar, who had saved the baggage of his army in the march upon Alhama.

It was a brilliant cavalcade, nearly three thousand strong, that set forth from the old city of Antiquera one morning in March, 1483, for the mountains of Malaga, with prancing steeds, flaunting banners, and amid the din of drum and trumpet. They should have reserved this noise and display for the return, however, for it proclaimed their purpose to the Moorish spies, who quickly informed the commander of the garrison at Malaga. He was a younger brother of Muley Aben Hassan, named Muley Abdallah, but more generally known as "El Zagal," or the Valiant. He was fierce and fiery, but extremely crafty, and when he heard of the prancing cavaliers approaching, resolved to meet them in the mountains and if possible cut them off. He first despatched trusty officers to arouse the mountaineers, who were all fanatical Mahometans, and then followed as rapidly as possible with his cavalry.

At sunset of their second day's march the Spaniards arrived within sight of Malaga and the Mediterranean, which they beheld at a distance from a lofty pass of the mountains.

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They were then in the midst of Moorish hamlets, scattered throughout the elevated valleys; but all the huts were deserted, for the mountaineers had been warned, and had fled to the fastnesses with all their belongings. From the battlements of lonely *atalayas*, or watch-towers, they looked down upon the Spanish horsemen struggling through deep *barrancas* and over the *ramblas*, or dry beds of mountain torrents.

As night came on, and the flames from huts and villages which the Spaniards had set on fire showed the mountaineers the perilous position of their foes, a shout of exultation went up from the Moors on every side. Showers of darts, stones, and arrows descended from the watch-towers and from the brinks of impending precipices, upon the heads of the Spaniards. Alarm-fires ran from rock to rock, and lighted up the gloomy scene sufficiently for the Moors to attack, but not for the Spaniards to repel the assaults of their almost invisible foes. Great rocks, loosened from the cliffs, came plunging down upon the hapless Spaniards, who knew not which way to turn in order to escape.

It was no longer "On to Malaga," but "Every man for himself," since all were

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equally helpless. In the midst of the tumult, while some of the Spanish horsemen were hemmed within a deep ravine, the war-cries of "El Zagal" resounded from the cliffs. Day was dawning, and the Marquis of Cadiz could see approaching down the defiles the trained troops of El Zagal, guided and supported by the mountaineers. He attempted to form his men in battle array, but through their ranks dashed fragments of rock, hurled from the cliffs above, while darts and lances fell like hail.

The horse of the marquis was killed beneath him. Two brothers and two nephews were pierced by lances and fell dead within his sight. A huge fragment of rock swept his last remaining brother, Beltram, from his saddle, crushed and dying, at which the marquis gave a cry of anguish and fled the field. All his relatives and most of his followers were either dead, wounded, or prisoners, so there was nothing to stay for, and, guided by a faithful adalide, he made his way back to Antiquera.

Thenceforth, for months, the marquis bided his time for revenge. It came before the year was ended, for one day his scouts reported the advent of a small body of

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Gomeres, or fighting Moors from Africa, who were ravaging the plains of Andalusia, not far from his capital city of Xeres. As his faithful troops were always prepared for action, he and they were soon on the trail of the invaders, who had become alarmed and were retreating towards the fastnesses of Ronda. The faster they retreated, the faster the marquis pursued, for in their flight some of the Moorish warriors had cast aside pieces of the very armor, such as helms and corselets, of which they had stripped the Christians in the mountains of Malaga. This proved them to be the same who had committed that dreadful massacre, and even though their numbers might be overwhelming, nothing on earth could stay the marquis in his pursuit.

The approach of night, and the apparent cessation of the pursuit (for the marquis had made a *détour* behind a hill, which hid him and his men from sight), gave the Gomeres confidence, and they halted awhile to refresh their panting steeds, on the banks of the river Guadalete. Suddenly, without warning, the avenging Spaniards burst forth, and though inferior in numbers, put them to flight, with slaughter. Many of the Moors wore armor

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which they had taken previously from the Spaniards, and these being recognized, were the first selected for massacre, while the marquis, seeing a powerful warrior riding the very horse on which his brother Beltram had been killed, attacked him with the fury of a tiger. The contest was short, though fierce, and ended in the death of the Moor, who could not withstand the onset of the avenger, whose lance transfixed and threw him to the ground. The enemy fled in wild confusion to the hills, hundreds of them falling by the way, to rise no more; but the marquis did not join now in the pursuit, since his brother had been avenged.

He caught the horse from which he had hurled the Moorish warrior, and gazed long and mournfully, as in a trance, at the empty saddle. Both steed and saddle Beltram, his brother, once had owned, and ridden into battle many times. Tears came to his eyes, a sigh burst from his bosom, and he murmured, as if communing with the departed, "*Ay de mi, hermano!*" (Woe is me, my brother!)

The brothers of the marquis had been avenged, but not the deadly insult to his pride of birth, and honor. He had hastened

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the war against the Moors of Granada by the taking of Alhama, which in turn had fallen in requital for the loss of Zahara. While the latter continued in possession of the Moors, he considered the fact a reproach against the Christians, and resolved to regain it for his king by force of arms or strategy. To resolve was to act, with this energetic Marquis of Cadiz. Having informed himself, through his spies, that Zahara was weakly garrisoned, he marched against it with about two thousand soldiers, horse and foot. It was in the month of October, 1483, and between midnight and morning, that he and his men secreted themselves in the ravines around the fortress of Zahara.

So silently and secretly had they arrived, that the Moors within had no knowledge of their coming, until, shortly after dawn, a small body of cavalry rode within gunshot of the fortress gate, as if to defy them to come out and skirmish. The Moors were ever brave and fiery, so a band of seventy sallied forth, and pursued the Christians towards the ravines, until, hearing a tumult behind them, they turned and saw a party of the enemy scaling the walls. Instantly they wheeled about for the gate, which they

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gained, though the Spaniards in ambush tried to cut them off. Failing in this attempt, the marquis immediately went to the assistance of Ortega de Prado, who was endeavoring to plant his ladders against the walls. Sword in hand, he sprang from his horse and mounted a ladder to the battlements, where he led his troops in such a vigorous attack upon the garrison, that the fortress was soon in possession of the Spaniards. For this gallant action the king gave him authority to use, in addition to his original title, that of the "Marquis of Zahara"; but as the Marquis of Cadiz he is better known.

Two years more passed away before the marquis signalized himself by a great action, though he was constantly engaged in warlike operations under the king. While the latter was vainly attempting to force the surrender of Malaga, in the year 1485, Rodrigo received intelligence from an apostate Moor of Ronda that its fortress, considered one of the strongest and most important then held by the enemy, was without an adequate force to repel a determined assault upon its walls. Ronda was like an eagle's nest, amid the crags of the sierras, with towers and triple walls

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rising above and surrounded by a ravine with precipitous sides, in the depths of which flowed a rapid river. It was under command of Hamet el Zegri, fiercest of African Moors, who had often defied the marquis and ravaged his territory. Rodrigo longed to meet and measure swords with him, but another reason for the capture of Ronda existed in the fact that within its dungeons were confined some of his former companions, who had been made captive in the Malaga mountains.

King Ferdinand fell in with Marquis Rodrigo's plan at once, heartily approving of the deep strategy at the bottom of it, which in brief was this: The king, who had really set about the siege of Malaga in earnest, was to return suddenly in the direction of Ronda, and surround it with his army. Meanwhile, Hamet el Zegri, attracted by the defenceless condition of Andalusia, from the plains of which the Christian troops had been withdrawn, could not resist a chance for ravage, and set forth with the better part of his garrison, intending to make a forced march into the heart of the land, gather an immense cavalgada of cattle and captives, and return without unnecessary delay. This, in the language of the great Captain Drake,

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who harried King Philip, a century later, would be "singeing the King of Spain's whiskers," in truth. But, as the sequel showed, it was the Moor who lost his whiskers, and not the Castilian, for, when Hamet el Zegri returned from his ravage, with vast herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and, in fact, spoil of every sort, he was astonished at hearing the thunder of cannon. Spurring his horse to a mountain crag that overlooked the region roundabout, he saw a vast army encamped beneath the walls of Ronda, which were visibly dissolving before a well-directed fire of artillery.

He raged and gnashed his teeth, of course; but to what avail? The Christian army was between him and his stronghold, overwhelmingly numerous, and so strong that repeated attempts to cut his way through it were repulsed with fearful loss to the Moorish forces. Old Zegri retreated into the heart of the mountains like a lion at bay, making frequent springs at his enemy, loath to abandon the stronghold in which he had formerly held sway without dispute; but at last he turned his back upon it, never to return.

The walls fell in masses and the great towers crumbled, beneath the cannon-fire of

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Ferdinand's gunners; fiery balls of tow were hurled into the town and set the houses in flames; but the stout-hearted inhabitants of Ronda did not capitulate until their water supply was cut off, and they were forced by thirst to surrender. The Marquis of Cadiz discovered the subterranean supply upon which they drew, by means of a shaft through the solid rock, and cut it off, by counter-mining from the side of a precipitous cliff.

The fall of Ronda was followed by the release of the Christians captured two years before, who had lain in the dungeons loaded with manacles, scarce daring to hope for deliverance. The chains they wore were exhibited to Queen Isabella, and afterwards hung on the walls of a church in Toledo known as San Juan de los Reyes—where the writer of this biography has seen them—reminders of Moorish barbarity four hundred years ago.

After the fall of Ronda, which was mainly due to the rare discernment of Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, this cavalier was, if possible, held in greater esteem than ever by the king. He accompanied him at court and in the field, and on one occasion, at Velez Malaga, in 1487, was instrumental in saving his life. The king had gone with the advance-guard

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to take possession of a height overlooking the city. Suddenly confronted by a superior force of the enemy, his escort was thrown into confusion, and Ferdinand, left for the moment unprotected, was surrounded by the Moors. They pressed upon him so closely that he could not draw the sword which hung at his saddle-bow, but with his lance he transfixed a Moor who had cut down one of his grooms, and then was helpless, in the midst of his foes.

“In this moment of awful jeopardy,” writes the talented author of the *Conquest of Granada*, “the Marquis of Cadiz and four other cavaliers came galloping to the scene of action, and, surrounding the king, made a loyal rampart of their bodies against the assaults of the Moors. The horse of the marquis was pierced by an arrow, and that worthy cavalier exposed to imminent danger; but with the aid of his valorous companions he quickly put the enemy to flight, and pursued them, with slaughter, to the very gates of the city.”

Such glorious actions as these we have narrated caused Rodrigo Ponce de Leon to be regarded as the “mirror of chivalry,” by the queen, who did not hesitate to declare

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him almost the equal in prowess of Spain's immortal hero, the great and glorious Cid. He always claimed the post of danger as his by right, and at the siege of Malaga, which was begun in the early summer of 1487, he was stationed opposite the most powerful fortress of Gibralfiero, against which he directed the fire of his lombards and led the assault.

While in camp here he was honored with a visit from his sovereigns, whom he entertained in a silken tent decorated with hangings of rich brocade. After serving a bountiful collation, he invited the queen and her ladies to witness the effect of a discharge of his artillery against the Gibralfiero fortress. As the thunder of the lombards woke the echoes of the mountains, and huge masses of the Moorish fortification fell to the ground, the high-born dames exclaimed with delight; but as the smoke rolled away, revealing the battlements of the fortress, their cries were subdued by a feeling of pity for their gallant host, whose swarthy cheeks, at the same moment, crimsoned with shame. For there they saw, floating above the ramparts, his own banner of Cadiz, which had been taken from him at the time of the

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massacre in the mountains. Some of the enemy, also, had arrayed themselves in garments and armor of which they had despoiled the Christians at that time, and at these things they pointed, as well as at the banner, with derisive gestures and cries.

The royal party was silent, from sympathy, and the marquis held his peace; but after the sovereigns' departure his repressed rage broke forth, in an artillery fire of redoubled intensity. All that night and next day the cannon roared and volleyed, until the tower from which the banner had flaunted so defiantly was reduced to ruins, and a breach opened in the lower walls. Advancing his camp still nearer, he meditated an assault next morning; but was forestalled by the Moors themselves, who, two thousand strong, sallied out, and put his men to flight. They nearly succeeded in capturing another banner, indeed, and utterly destroying the camp, when he stemmed the tide, sword in hand, and, shouting to his men: "To the foe! To the foe!" turned what threatened to be a defeat into a victory. It was a barren one, however, and dearly was it bought, for many cavaliers had fallen, and among them the brave Ortega de Prado, who

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may be said to have begun the final war against the Moors of Granada, by his initiative at the storming of Alhama.

In this destructive war to the death, which was prolonged through ten years of almost incessant fighting, the Marquis of Cadiz, Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, bore a most important part, from its beginning to its ending, in 1492. He was one of the cavaliers selected by King Ferdinand to act as sponsors to his son, Prince Juan, when he began his career of arms and received the dignity of knighthood on the field of war, beneath the walls of Granada. He was also one of the principal nobles who accompanied the king in that last campaign against the Moors of Granada, when, with an army fifty thousand strong, in the month of April, 1491, he began the siege which was not to end until the last Moslem had capitulated. He took an active part in every engagement in front of the walls, witnessed the raising of the Spanish banner above the tower of La Vela, and was one of the knightly cavalcade that guarded the sovereigns when they received the capitulation of Boabdil, last king of the Moors, on the banks of the Xenil.

It was in January, 1492, that the Marquis

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of Cadiz entered the glorious Alhambra palace, in the train of Ferdinand and Isabella, and participated in the ceremonies that attended their re-enthronement in the famed "Hall of Justice." He may have been there when, a little later, in the same place, they signed the "capitulation" with Columbus for the voyage that resulted in the discovery of America; but a few weeks after he returned to his marquisate, hoping to enjoy the pleasures of a lasting peace. It was not to be his privilege, however, for, exhausted by the fatigues he had undergone and the wounds he had received, he expired at Seville August 27, 1492.

III

PONCE DE LEON IN AMERICA

1493-1502

RODRIGO PONCE DE LEON, Marquis of Cadiz, the foremost Spanish champion in the Moorish wars, passed away seven months after the surrender of Granada, and in that very month of August, 1492, which witnessed the sailing of Christopher Columbus for the New World, afterwards called America. Long before he closed his eyes to earthly scenes, he had achieved a reputation far surpassing that of any other Ponce de Leon; but another of the name was soon in the field, who was to perpetuate his most heroic exploits, though in a land far distant over the ocean.

Juan Ponce de Leon (who, needless to say, perhaps, is the actual subject of this biography) was also engaged in the wars against the Moors of Granada, but in a humbler capacity than his illustrious ex-

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emplar. He was born at San Servos, province of Campos, Spain, in 1560, and was thus seventeen years the junior of Rodrigo Ponce, as well as his inferior in rank. Taken into the household of Don Pero Nuñez de Guzman as a page, he afterwards won his way to distinction of a sort, but has not to his credit in Spain such doughty deeds as are ascribed to Rodrigo the marquis. The Spanish historians have little to say of his life in the land of his birth, save to mention that he served in the wars without becoming conspicuous either for bravery or cowardice, and assisted his king, like many thousand others, in wresting the province of Granada from the Moors.

It might be a pleasure to know, and to be able to say, that young Juan Ponce, of Leon, was a great favorite with King Ferdinand and his consort; that he everywhere followed his titled namesake into the thickest of the fray; that he bearded the Moslem warriors in their strongholds, and that he finally retired to his estates with vast spoil obtained from the infidels. But we must defer to the verities of history, which are silent as to the formative period of Juan Ponce's career. We may imagine all these

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things; and it is within the realm of probability that Juan, like Rodrigo, was present at the conference between the sovereigns and Columbus; that he may have seen the great navigator when, in sorrow and sadness, he left Queen Isabella's silken tent with the intention of departing from Spain forever; or witnessed his joyous return to receive her sanction to his enterprise, after having been overtaken by her messenger at the Bridge of Pines.

Rodrigo the marquis left Granada for his home, but to die; Columbus went to Palos, whence he sailed for a new world beyond the ocean; Juan Ponce disappears, after leaving Granada, and quite ten years elapse before he clearly appears against a background of events important in themselves. In order to account for him after the siege, some of the older historians have him sail with Columbus on his voyage of 1493; and this is far from improbable, though there exists no proof. The author of the *Ensayo Cronologico para la Historia de Florida*, published in 1723, says, quoting Oviedo's *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*: "Ponce de Leon was one of the original conquistadores of Hispaniola, having gone there with Don

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Cristopher Columbus, in 1493, as a captain of infantry."

Oviedo, the historian, to whom this reference is made, makes the statement that Juan Ponce de Leon went to Hispaniola, or Santo Domingo, as a captain; that he was a man well-born, and hidalgo. "I knew him very well," he says, "and he is one of those who came to these parts [he was writing of the West Indies] with the first admiral, Don Christopher Columbus, in the second voyage which he made to these islands."¹

Richard Eden, the English translator of Peter Martyr's *Decades*, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, quaintly says: "This John Ponce had before sayled with Christopher Colon to the ilande of Hispaniola, in the yeare 1493. He was a gentle souldier in the warres of ths ilande, and captayne of the prouince of Higuel for Nycolas de Ovando, that conquered the same." The best-known of modern historians, Washington Irving, accepts this statement also; but if Juan Ponce sailed to the West Indies in

¹ "Yo conosco muy bien, y es uno de los que pasaron á estas partes con el Almirante primero, don Cristóbal Colon, en el segundo viage que hizo a estas Indias."—*Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, lib. 16, cap. xiii.

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1493, and was afterwards, as some say, concerned in the conspiracy of Francisco Roldan (who plotted and eventually accomplished the overthrow of Christopher Columbus and his brothers), he held such an obscure position as to merit no mention by contemporary chroniclers.

Whenever he went to the West Indies, when at last he bursts upon our vision he is a seasoned soldier of capacity. Such he is when the first mention is made of deeds of his worthy the telling. He was thirty-two years of age when Granada surrendered; he was forty-two when Ovando, with whom he served, embarked for the West Indies, and fifty-two when he went in search of the mythical "fountain of youth." He was a young man in the first instance, still young in the second instance, and not beyond middle-age when the third occurred; yet nearly every writer alludes to him as "old."

"Age had not tempered the love of enterprise," says Bancroft, referring to an adventure in 1509, when Ponce de Leon was only forty-nine; yet this historian lived to be nearly twice that age, and doubtless would have resented being called "elderly" at fifty or under. Again, after his vain search

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for the fountain of youth, he "remained an *old* man," says the same writer; yet he was then only fifty-three, and scarce sixty-two when an Indian arrow terminated his career. But Juan Ponce de Leon appears on the world's stage a veteran at the outset, springing into the arena, like Minerva, fully armed and equipped.

Nicolas de Ovando, who was despatched to Hispaniola by King Ferdinand to supersede Francisco de Bobadilla (the man who won unenviable distinction by sending the Columbus brothers home to Spain in chains), was a person whom a monarch might trust, but an ordinary man of affairs would not. Ferdinand of Spain was impressed by his gracious presence and his courtesy, his fluent speech, his superficial modesty, and, courtier-like, neglected to pry beneath that promising exterior. Perhaps he did not care to, for this red-headed commander of the order of Alcantara, who afterwards proved himself a veritable fiend in human guise, possessed influence at court which would have landed him in high position, had the grand cardinal himself opposed.

Sent out to the West Indies ostensibly to succeed Bobadilla, but in reality to oppose

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the just claims of Columbus, and wring from the despairing natives their last grain of gold and tribute of labor, Ovando measured fully up to his sovereign's expectations. Selfish, avaricious, coldly calculating, brutal, Ferdinand himself could not surpass this loathsome creature selected to carry out his purposes in Hispaniola. But he had at his command almost unlimited resources, and he sailed from Spain with the largest fleet that had ever left its shores for those of the New World, consisting of thirty ships, carrying out twenty-five hundred emigrants, including people of rank and high connections.

The misled sovereigns allowed the despicable Ovando to dress himself in silks and brocades, in evidence of his elevated rank, and to surround himself with a body-guard of seventy-two esquires; but it had not been long since the man Columbus, who discovered the island to which this wretch was sent with authority, had returned to Spain a prisoner and in chains! The expedition sailed on February 13, 1502, and, after a stormy voyage, in which one of the vessels foundered, carrying down with it more than one hundred passengers, arrived at Hispaniola two months later.

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The city of Santo Domingo, on the south coast of the island, had been founded by Don Bartholomew, brother of Christopher Columbus, six years before. It owed its origin to the richness of the surrounding country, for its harbor, at the mouth of the river Ozama, was the nearest of any to the region in which gold had been discovered in quantities. The exaggerated reports of its richness which had been sent to Spain had crowded Ovando's ships with adventurers, who, as soon as they landed, hastened at once to the mines, where they expected to find the precious metal lying in great nuggets on the surface of the ground and glistening in the waters of the streams.

It is true that the largest nugget ever sent to Spain from America was found in this auriferous region, at about eight leagues distance from the city. It was the same on which the lucky discoverers served a roasted pig, vaunting that the King of Spain himself could not boast such a table; but they lost it, not long after, having shipped it in the vessel that sank with Bobadilla, in the terrible hurricane predicted by Columbus.

The good bishop, Las Casas, who was in the island at the time the adventurers landed

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and scurried for the mines, says that they "expected to gather gold as easily and readily as fruit from the trees"; but, alas, how soon and how bitterly were they disappointed! Unused to labor of any kind, they promptly abandoned the mines, when they found that gold could only be obtained by toilful digging, and it was not long before the roads and trails leading to Santo Domingo were again thronged with these same despairing cavaliers, who, having exhausted their resources, besought Ovando to send them back to Spain. That would have been the wisest course to pursue, for the island was already over-populated with worthless Spaniards of the non-producing class; but the governor induced them to remain by bestowing extensive grants of land, along with which went large numbers of Indians as slaves.

Now, Ovando had been expressly forbidden by Isabella and Ferdinand to continue this system of *repartimientos*, as the wholesale distribution of the natives in this manner was termed. In fact, he had been commanded to abolish it throughout the island; but, finding that the Indians would not work unless compelled, he had not carried out the wishes

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of the sovereigns. Instead, he had represented to them that the natives not only refused to labor, when released from their obligation to do so, but lapsed into paganism, to the great detriment of their morals. This hypocritical plea had its effect upon Isabella, who ordered the Indians under restraint again, but recommended that they should be paid for their labor and treated humanely.

The word humanity was not in the Spaniard's vocabulary, and it could hardly be expected that the fiendish Ovando would have use for it. He had, in effect, the sovereigns' authority for re-enslaving the Indians, and promptly availed himself of it to bestow upon his friends all the natives he could capture, by the use of dogs and savage soldiery. Soon there was no portion of the island exempt from ravage, no body of Indians that was not forced to labor for the Spaniards.

"Under cover of this hired labor," says the veracious historian, Mr. Irving, "more intolerable toil was exacted from them, and more horrible cruelties were inflicted, than in the worst days of Bobadilla. They were often separated the distance of several days' journey from their wives and children, and

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doomed to intolerable labor of all kinds, extorted by the cruel infliction of the lash. For food they had only cassava bread, an unsubstantial support for men obliged to labor, and so little of that that when the Spaniards who superintended the mines were at their repasts (says Las Casas), the famished Indians scrambled under the table, like dogs, for any bone thrown to them. . . . While the Spaniards thus withheld the nourishment necessary to sustain their health and strength, they exacted a degree of labor sufficient to break down the most vigorous man. If the Indians fled from this incessant toil and took refuge in the mountains, they were hunted out like wild beasts, scourged in the most inhuman manner, and laden with chains to prevent a second escape.

“Many perished long before their term of labor expired. Those who survived their term of six or eight months were permitted to return to their homes until the next term commenced; but their homes were often fifty or sixty miles distant. They had nothing to sustain them through the long journey but a few roots, peppers, or a little cassava bread. Worn down by long-continued toil and cruel hardships, which their

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feeble constitutions were incapable of sustaining, many had not strength to perform the journey, but sank down and died by the way: some by the side of a brook, others under the shade of a tree, where they had crawled for shelter from the sun."

It must be remembered that this report of Spanish cruelties was not made on hearsay, but came from an eye-witness, Bishop Las Casas, who continues: "I have found many an Indian dead in the road, others gasping under the trees, and others in the pangs of death, faintly crying, 'Hunger! hunger!' Those who reached their homes most commonly found them desolate, for during the eight months they had been absent their wives and children had either perished or wandered away; the fields on which they depended for food were overrun with weeds, and nothing was left them but to lie down, exhausted and despairing, and die at the thresholds of their habitations."

Such was the sway of Don Nicolas de Ovando in Hispaniola. Under his rule the natives dwindled steadily; at his orders they were enslaved, beaten into submission, driven into the grave, by hundreds and by thousands; but worse was yet in store for



OLD PART OF ST. DOMINGO

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these unfortunate Indians of Hispaniola. They were to be hounded to the verge of extermination by this same Ovando, who, as soon as he was firmly seated as governor, began the process of decimation.

Casting about for some defenceless natives upon whom he might actively exercise his powers for evil, he found that a tribe existed in the western part of the island which had not been completely subjugated—that is, had not been wholly brought under the system of repartimientos. It was ruled by a once-beautiful caciquess, the sister of a cacique known as Behechio, whose name was Anacaona. She had been a friend of that most noble brother of Christopher Columbus, Don Bartholomew, and this alone was sufficient to make her the victim of Ovando's malevolence. Her beautiful daughter, Higuenamota, had been beloved by a Spanish cavalier, one Hernando de Guevra, who on this account had been persecuted by Christopher Columbus, at the instigation of the rebel Roldan. The last-named, after declaring against the rule of Columbus, several years previous to the arrival of Ovando, had finally come to terms with him, and afterwards sought a retreat in Anacaona's

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province, where he and his companions in iniquity perpetrated every species of crime that their depraved natures could suggest. It may be imagined what treatment the caciquess Anacaona received; and as to her daughter's fate, history is silent, though tradition states it was worse than death itself.

Anacaona's subjects were gentle and generous, like their queen; they had received the Spaniards most hospitably, and had never raised a hand nor drawn a sword against them prior to the coming of Ovando. They even endured the ills this wretch had put upon them without rising in open rebellion; yet they were not wholly spiritless. They had endured so much that their oppressors knew it was impossible for them to suffer more without an appeal to arms; for they were numerically strong, though inferior to the Spaniards in discipline, and lacking weapons that could be used with effect against them.

Though they had occasionally turned upon their tormentors, and individual instances had occurred of Indians, goaded to desperation, suddenly springing upon and throttling a brutal Spanish overseer, there had been

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no concerted attempt at an uprising. When, however, reports were brought to Ovando that one was meditated by the sub-caciques of Anacaona's tribe, he eagerly availed himself of the opportunity for invading her territory. He gathered together three hundred and seventy soldiers, infantry and cavalry, and marched direct for Xaragua, which was the seat of Anacaona's authority. To the unsuspecting caciquess he sent word that he was coming on a friendly visit, and Anacaona assembled all her chiefs and sub-caciques to do him honor. Other Spaniards, notably Don Bartholomew Columbus, had visited her as Ovando came, with an armed force, and had been entertained without anything untoward happening to her people; so she held this to be but another instance of the kind. As the Spanish army approached her village, troops of damsels met the soldiers with singing and dancing, and the waving of palm-leaves over their heads. These naked beauties were as innocent as they were graceful and pleasing; yet but a few days passed ere many of them were numbered with the hundreds of slain Indians that strewed the very ground they trod in rhythmic measure.

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After several days of feasting, during which the Spaniards enjoyed every dainty known to the Indians, and which the latter set before them with evident pleasure, the treacherous Ovando, who had been brooding constantly over his suspicions, gave the signal for a massacre. It had been preconcerted with his officers that he was to lay his hand upon a cross he wore on his breast—the cross of the high order of which he was a commander, that of Alcantara—for the bloodshed to begin. Comely Anacaona and her lovely daughter had just entered the hut in which Ovando was lodged, accompanied by their train of female attendants, to proffer a request that he would order a joust of reeds to commence, in which the cavalry were to take part. So he strode forth, but instead of contributing his share to the entertainment his Indian friends had provided, he requited their hospitality with slaughter.

At the signal, the cavalry charged with drawn swords and levelled lances upon the unsuspecting throng of naked Indians, who had gathered in the square of the village to do honor to their murderers. The infantry let loose their cross-bows and arquebuses,

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hacked with their halberds and smote with battle-axes, and shortly there was no Indian left alive in the square—or, at least, no Indian whom the Spaniards intended should live. Even children, and babes at their mothers' breasts, were slashed with swords, and impaled on pikes and lances.

In one great house of the village were gathered eighty-four of Anacaona's subcaciques, and these were all burned alive, or caught and hanged to trees as they escaped from the flaming dwelling. Some of them were first put to the torture and information elicited upon which the fiendish Ovando proceeded against Anacaona, whom he took to Santo Domingo and hanged, in front of the church—the second in America—which the Spaniards had erected for the worship of the God they professed to serve.

These things did Ovando, with whom, in Hispaniola, Juan Ponce de Leon served as a soldier, from whom he received the command that first brought him prominence, and the impulse towards the career that placed him in the temple of fame.

IV

A SOLDIER IN HISPANIOLA

1503-1508

WHEN Columbus discovered the island called by him Hispaniola, or Little Spain, since known as Haiti and Santo Domingo, it was swarming with a native population estimated by Bishop Las Casas at scarcely less than a million. These Indians are particularly described in the *Life of Columbus*, which is the first volume in the *Heroes of American History* series; but we may at least be permitted to refer to the fact that they were governed by five great caciques, or native chiefs, who had long since apportioned the island between them. Guacanagari, whose territory lay along the north coast, and who was the first cacique to greet the Spaniards on their arrival, who had gone to the rescue of Columbus when his flag-ship was wrecked on the reefs off Cape Haitian, who had placed all his posses-

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sions at the disposal of the strangers and allowed them to build a fort in his dominions, was the first to meet death at their hands.

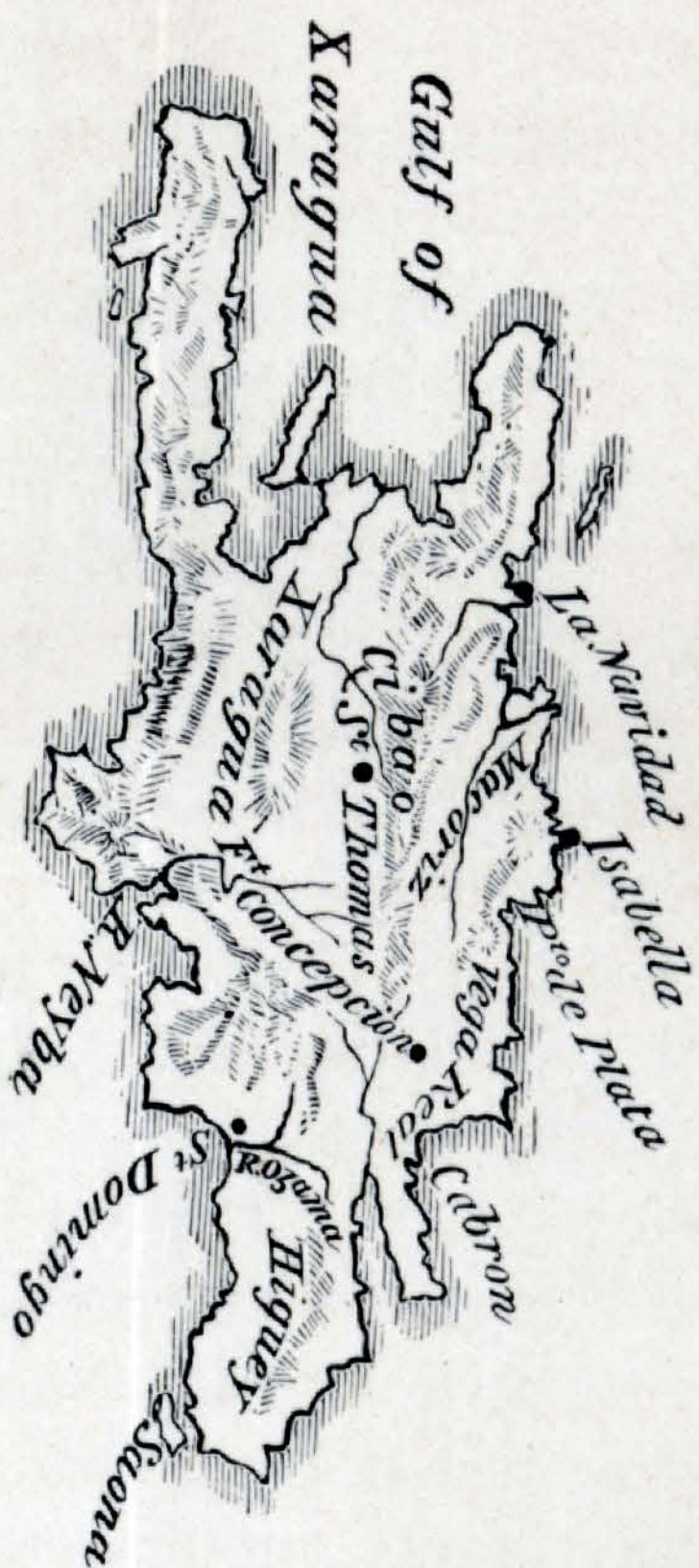
Then followed the "Lord of the Golden House," Caonabo, the spirited chieftain who lived in the mountains, who was captured by stratagem, imprisoned at Isabella, the first settlement, and died in chains and misery on the voyage to Spain. Guarionex, the lord of the royal Vega, or great plain of the interior, saw his people massacred by the Spaniards, and was drowned while a prisoner on board a ship which went down in a hurricane. Behechio, the brother-in-law of Caonabo, died of grief, it is said, because of the outrages perpetrated by the Spaniards, who overran his territory, in the western part of the island, and reduced many of his people to slavery.

During the ten years intervening between the coming of Columbus and Ovando, the native population had been reduced one-half, or at least one-third, by means of deliberate massacres, famine, and sickness, incidental to the compulsory labor in the mines, and innumerable atrocities, the mere narration of which almost chills the blood

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with horror. The Spaniards overran the island "like fiends let loose from hell," by means of blood-hounds ferreting out and destroying such fugitives as fled from their oppressions in the mines and on the plantations, and sought refuge in the forests and mountains. The distresses of the natives culminated when Ovando took the field (as already narrated), and, his wolfish instinct awakened by the sight and scent of blood, hunted his helpless prey like a wild beast of the forest. Troops of savage horsemen scoured the plains, equally savage footmen invaded the mountains, and the Indians that did not die of starvation were sought out and slain, even in caverns and ravines where they had taken refuge.

Having reduced the Indians of Anacaona's country to subjection, after bringing them to the verge of extermination, Ovando declared that section of the island subjugated. In token of his triumph, after slaughtering thousands of peaceful natives and committing atrocities unspeakable, he founded a town near the centre of Xaragua province, which, with horrible irony, he named *Santa Maria de la Verdadera Paz*, or Saint Mary of the Veritable Peace. Then he and his



MAP OF HISPANIOLA

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band of murderers returned to the city of Santo Domingo, where they brought this carnival of bloodshed to a close by the hanging of Queen Anacaona and her surviving chieftains.

The ruins may be seen to-day, on the left bank of the river Ozama, of the chapel in which, according to tradition, Don Nicolas de Ovando piously rendered thanks to the Almighty for his victory over the natives. In this same chapel, a few years before, Don Francisco de Bobadilla had caused to be proclaimed his authority from the Spanish sovereigns for arresting Columbus and expelling him from the island. Don Francisco had perished in the hurricane of which he had been warned by his victim, who was then on his fourth and last voyage to the West Indies, and was soon to experience the vindictive ferocity of Bobadilla's successor.

It was towards the end of that voyage, which was the most unfortunate Columbus had ever undertaken, that he was wrecked, on the coast of Jamaica, and for a twelve-month imprisoned in a half-sunken, stranded hulk, while awaiting succor from Ovando. With the latter, during his Xaragua campaign, was the unwilling messenger, Diego

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Mendez, whom Columbus had sent imploring assistance. The faithful Mendez, after experiencing the perils of a voyage across the channel between Jamaica and Haiti in a canoe, during which several of his companions died from exposure, and the whole party nearly perished from thirst, was compelled to await Ovando's pleasure for many months, while Columbus and his people were suffering from starvation. Ovando's intention, doubtless, was to delay sending assistance to his rival until he should have succumbed to the deadly perils which environed him; and he is said to have been greatly chagrined when the vessel, which he finally despatched to Jamaica, arrived at Santo Domingo with Columbus on board.

Great were the grief and indignation of Columbus and his brother, Don Bartholomew (who was then in his company), to learn of what had taken place in Xaragua. A province which they knew as a veritable Eden of delights had been given over to bloodshed and ravage; a queen, whose gracious hospitality Don Bartholomew had experienced, and whose lovely qualities were known to both, had been executed like a common malefactor.

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But they were helpless to avenge the Indians' wrongs. Indeed, the Admiral must have reflected, sadly if not remorsefully, that he had been the first to commit those wrongs. Scant ten years had elapsed since he marched with his army through the great mountain-valley known as the royal Vega, then teeming with people and abounding in natural productions for the sustenance of man. The battle of the Vega had been fought, which he had overlooked from the hill of Santo Cerro. On the one side were mailed soldiers armed with swords and arquebuses, assisted by ferocious blood-hounds; on the other a horde of naked Indians, helpless in their ignorance of stern war's requirements, and defenceless save for weapons of the rudest sort. It was not a battle, it was a massacre, and he, Columbus, was the real author and instigator of it. He was, in truth, but the precursor of Roldan, Bobadilla, and Ovando, each more ferocious, more fiendish than the other. What, then, could he say to Ovando in rebuke; what could he do, even had he the desire, to stay the ravage? He could say nothing, do nothing; so he went back to Spain in sorrow, a broken-hearted, utterly despairing man,

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there to find his royal patroness, Isabella, near her death, and Ferdinand deaf to his petitions for relief.

We have nothing more to do with the deeds of Columbus, except as we come upon their consequences while following the adventures of that hitherto elusive cavalier, Juan Ponce de Leon, whose real career commences as that of the great discoverer nears its end. If he saw Columbus (as doubtless he may have seen him) at the time he was dictating terms to Ferdinand and Isabella, at Granada, so in all probability he met him after his rescue, in Santo Domingo. For Juan Ponce was in Santo Domingo at the time—in the island, if not in the city—and had won the commendation of Governor Ovando by his “sagacity and valor” in warfare with the Indians.

It is not to his credit either to have found favor with Ovando or to have shown proficiency in his trade or profession, which was that of the soldier—in other words, a murderer. There might have been an excuse for his adoption of this pursuit in Spain, inasmuch as he was fighting the enemies of his country; but in Hispaniola there were no enemies to combat. The

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Indians never made an assault, never laid an ambushade or attacked a dwelling, save in retaliation for crimes committed by the Spaniards, who were always the aggressors. When they ceased from plundering, the Indians returned to their homes; when they sheathed the sword, or called back their blood-hounds, the "war" was over.

Whether Juan Ponce de Leon came to Hispaniola with Columbus in 1493, or with Ovando in 1502, the first view we get of this doughty cavalier shows him engaged in a disreputable business. Not only disreputable, but debasing and murderous, for he was harrying defenceless natives: driving them from their homes, setting fire to their huts, and making them feel the keen edge of his sword.

These acts were not held to be debasing by the "Christian" cavalier of that period—and doubtless that was what Don Juan Ponce considered himself. The Christian cavaliers of Spain had harried the Moors in a similar manner, and had plundered the Jews as effectually as they plucked the Indians of Hispaniola, and both these people were civilized. They differed from the Spaniards in their religious belief, however, and

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that in itself, the so-called Christian cavaliers opined, was sufficient to cause them to be sent to the stake, and, if they did not recant, to burn in the fires of hell forever after.

Now, the unfortunate Indians were neither civilized nor Christians, consequently they were not, in the opinion of the Spaniards, entitled to any consideration whatever. Drove of them were baptized, thousands cast away their idols and professed a belief in the Spaniards' God; but these subterfuges availed them only to escape the torments of the hereafter—or, at least, did not mitigate those inflicted by the "Christian" cavaliers. They continued their tortures, they deprived the natives of their gold, their homes, and finally of their lives; for the last of the race passed out of existence hundreds of years ago.

Four of the Indian caciquedoms, as we have seen, were subjugated, and their rulers murdered, within ten years of the first arrival of Columbus. There yet remained another, which, in the year 1504, met its fate at the hands of Ovando. This was the province of Higüey, which included the eastern portion of the island, vast and fertile, inhabited by a very warlike people. North of it lay

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the bay of Samana, on the shore of which Columbus had his first encounter with American Indians; east lay the Mona channel, separating Santo Domingo from the island of Porto Rico, and the south coast was laved by the waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Off this south coast lies a lonely islet known as Saona, the shores of which are rugged, the interior wild and forest-covered. Saona to-day is almost as lonely and desolate as in the time, four hundred years ago, of which we write. It was then a retreat of the cacique of Higüey, who retired thither as to a fortress when he wished to rest undisturbed. One day, from his lofty aerie on the crags of Saona, the cacique of Higüey espied a Spanish shallop bearing down to take the channel between his islet and the larger island.

It was not often that Spaniards fell into the clutches of the Indians; but here was an evident opportunity not only for plunder, but at the same time for revenge. Only a few weeks had passed since Cotubanama (for that was the name of the cacique of Higüey) had seen a fellow-chief killed—torn to pieces before his very eyes—by a

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blood-hound, set upon him by a Spaniard. He himself had narrowly escaped the fangs of the ferocious brute, having lingered to assist his friend, though in vain.

He clutched his great bow and three-pronged arrows, and with long strides set off for the shore, followed by a few retainers. There he found a sufficient number of Indians to man three war-canoes, with which he skirted the cliffs, and in their shelter lingered till dusk, waiting for the shallop to become becalmed, in the interval between the sea and land breeze. He had rightly calculated, for night, as he expected, found the boat idly drifting between the two islands. The Spaniards, eight in number, lay down to sleep, not anticipating harm from the direction of the sea, and knowing that a few hours must elapse before the land breeze would be strong enough to waft them onward. Swiftly and silently the canoes closed about the shallop, over the bulwarks of which the Indians swarmed noiselessly—and it came to pass that the friend of Cotubanama was, that night, avenged!

When the sad tidings reached Ovando he was at headquarters in Santo Domingo,

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resting after his foray into the Xaragua country. His soldiers were with him, encamped in the suburbs of the town, along the banks of the river Ozama. They were panting like hounds that had been on a hunt, having had little rest, and were worn down with fatigue; but the prospect of a fresh quarry to pursue and the plunder of a people that had never been ravaged, enlivened them as it were wine had been given them. Four hundred of them were told off for the invasion of Higüey, and placed under the command of a veteran campaigner, Juan de Esquivel. With him in a subordinate capacity, as captain of a company, went Juan Ponce de Leon.

Incidentally we may remark, the forays of Governor Ovando against the Indians of Hispaniola brought to light several individuals who achieved a greater reputation than himself, for at Xaragua he had with him Velasquez, who commanded the company that penned Anacaona's caciques in a hut of the village and then destroyed them by setting it on fire. This cavalier was afterwards selected by Don Diego Columbus, who succeeded Ovando in the government of the island, to accomplish the conquest of

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Cuba, which he did, assisted by Fernando Cortés, who also fleshed his sword on the natives of Xaragua. Now he brings to the front, though unwittingly, Juan Ponce de Leon; but doubtless, could he have foreseen what a great career he was opening before him, he would rather have slain him in cold blood. Juan Ponce was at that time merely a soldier of fortune, apparently with no other wealth than his sword and what it brought him. He was a good soldier, but by no means a super-excellent one, though, it was said, Ovando was attracted by his dogged courage, his uncomplaining fortitude, and had him in mind for promotion.

Before the little army left the capital for the unknown province of Higüey, the governor harangued the troops, in an open field back of the chapel, on the left bank of the river. "You must know, my men," he said, addressing Juan de Esquivel and Juan Ponce in particular, but in a voice that all might hear—"You must know, that this province of Higüey is a virgin field, so far as invasion by Christians is concerned. Hence I scarce need to tell you there will probably be found vast spoil of gold, perchance of silver; for those barbarians have been raking the sands

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and gleaning the streams for centuries. It was known to the Colombinos, who intended to invade it, but, in the providence of God, were prevented by my opportune arrival."

At this point the pious governor clasped his hands and turned his eyes to heaven, while the soldiers huzzaed most heartily. Then he concluded: "The people of Higuey are the worst of pagans—heathen, without a redeeming trait, and hence ye will not spare them, neither men, nor women, nor children. Go, my sons, and may Heaven help ye to render a good account of the incorrigible heathen of Higuey."

V

THE REBELLION IN HIGUEY

1504

COTUBANAMA, cacique of Higüey, and last survivor of Hispaniola's chieftains, was the equal of Caonabo the Carib in valor, and the strongest man of his tribe. Bishop Las Casas says that he was as perfectly formed as any man he had ever seen, of whatever nationality. He was a yard in breadth across his shoulders, and in stature overtopped the tallest of his subjects, yet was so admirably proportioned that he did not appear the giant that he was, unless contrasted with others. He seems to have been the counterpart of that great warrior, Tuscaloosa, whom De Soto met and conquered in Florida. Though his countenance was grave and his aspect dignified, he was not handsome, but as courageous as a lion. There was not a man in the Spanish army that could bend his cross-bow, nor a native

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in the island that had not heard of and dreaded his three-pronged arrows, tipped with bones of fishes, which he shot with unerring aim.

Immediately after the murder of the Spaniards on the shallop, he had passed over to the main island, and, taking with him many of his people, made for the mountains. They were wild and rugged, while numerous caverns in the cliffs afforded shelter from the elements. Cotubanama knew what would be the consequences of his crime, and intrenched himself against the coming of the Spaniards, who were not long in getting on his trail and following it to his mountain fastnesses. He left small bands of warriors in the lowlands, to impede the progress of the Spaniards, and, if possible, divert them from his place of refuge; but their efforts were in vain. They fought stubbornly, all the way from the sea to the foot-hills, and the few survivors then fled to the caverns in the cliffs. There they reported that the mailed soldiers carried everything before them; that they had destroyed the villages, burned, in the ruins of their humble dwellings, such of the women and children as they caught, and ended by hanging an old and greatly

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venerated caciquess named Higuanaama, who was the titular ruler of Higuey.¹ Following the example set them by Governor Ovando in the Xaragua country, the soldiers under Esquivel committed every sort of outrage upon the defenceless females and children, as well as upon the warriors taken in the field. They shut up all their captives, six or seven hundred in number, in one of the immense communal dwellings, and then set it on fire, stabbing with sword and poniard such as attempted to escape.

It was not from fear or cowardice, evidently, that Cotubanama had retreated to the mountains himself, leaving some of his people exposed to ravage in the lowlands; but the prudence of a commander who knew his loss would be irreparable. He afterwards made amends for this apparent cowardice by fighting various groups of Spaniards single-handed; but that was when, driven to bay, he battled in desperation for his very life. He had the sagacity to see that his naked warriors could not successfully encounter the mailed men of Spain in open

¹ “*El quinto reyno se llamo Higuey, cuyo trono poseia una señora mui anciana nombrada Higuanaama. Los Españoles la hicieron ahorcar.*”—Bishop Las Casas.

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conflict, nor even when given the advantage of deep forests and tangled thickets; so he despatched a messenger to sue for peace. This Indian was next to his chief in size and rank, exceedingly courageous, and of a bold and lofty demeanor. He undertook the mission reluctantly, and Cotubanama, suspicious that he might commit some rash act which would defeat his plans, sent also another messenger by a different path through the forest. It was well he did so, for his sub-chief, whether intentionally or not is unknown, met and attacked two Spanish cavaliers in a narrow pass, and, though they were mounted on horseback, and armed at every point, succeeded in getting possession of all their weapons. But when the fight was over, he had been pierced in many places by the swords and lances of his opponents, and, fierce and implacable to the last, fell dead at their feet. Such was the fierce resolution of the Higueyans, the last unconquered aborigines of Hispaniola. To a man, it is believed, they would have fought in defence of their country, had not Cotubanama, from motives of policy, asked for peace.

It suited Juan de Esquivel to cease from

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fighting, on the condition that such of the Indians as had been captured should be retained as slaves, and a vast acreage of land planted in maize for the support of the invaders. It may be recalled, by those familiar with the life of Columbus, that at one time the cacique of the royal Vega offered to sow the great plain, over a space extending from the mountains to the sea, with Indian-corn, or maize, in lieu of tribute, but that his oppressor refused the proffer. Famine ensued, owing to the scarcity of laborers in the field, and such Spaniards as survived starvation were impressed with the necessity of cultivating the soil, as well as digging beneath its surface for gold. Hence the proposition to Cotubanama, which the cacique accepted, in the name of his people, and a peace was declared.

Both Esquivel and Ponce de Leon were greatly taken with the stern and savage chieftain, whose giant frame commanded their admiration, and whose skill at shooting the cross-bow surprised them. They invited him to dine in their tent with them, and the commander exchanged names with him, thenceforth the Spaniard being called Cotubanama, and the Indian, Esquivel. Not

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long after, the cacique had occasion to invoke his Christian name, when in dire extremity; but without avail, for the Spaniards did not hold this ceremony in such estimation as the savages, with whom it meant perpetual fraternity and friendship.

A wooden fortress was erected near the sea, at a point commanding the channel between Hispaniola and Saona, of which a captain named Martin de Villaman was left in charge, with a handful of men. Considering the country pacified, Esquivel returned to Santo Domingo city, laden with spoil and followed by a long train of dejected captives. He must have been singularly constituted to imagine that Cotubanama would tamely submit to have his province despoiled and his people enslaved. In point of fact, the cacique had made a pretence of submission only, on account of being unprepared for war. If he had not contemplated a breach of the peace compact before Esquivel left Higüey, he soon had a pretext, in the licentious conduct of the Spaniards left behind as a garrison, who not only held the native women in slight regard, but shamefully mistreated them. Neither the daughters, sisters, nor even the wives, of the

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caciques were safe from their oppressions, and soon the subjects of Cotubanama rose in their might, destroyed the fortress, and slaughtered all the Spaniards save one, who escaped in a canoe and bore the frightful tidings to Santo Domingo.

Great was the rage and deep the indignation of Ovando, who sent for Esquivel and demanded that he get ready at once for a second invasion of Higüey. This time, in addition to the Spanish regulars, he had with him a large force of Indians, who, too unwarlike for soldiers, served as carriers of the luggage, and scouts. The governor adjured his lieutenant to show no mistaken lenity to Cotubanama and his people on this occasion. "Fire and sword! Fire and sword!" he exclaimed, angrily. "Burn them in their huts! Hang them from the ceiba-trees! And to make the occupation permanent, leave there Juan Ponce, with sufficient force to quell any uprising—if any remain of the pestiferous heathen—for him I appoint adelantado of the province."

Juan Ponce did not regard his new appointment—which appears to have been his first promotion in many a year—with the favor that might have been expected; but

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it was a step in advance. He was no longer a common soldier, striving for an end that never came in sight; for, as ruler in prospective over a province as yet unconquered, he was elevated above the common herd of adventurers by this act of the governor. He placed his affairs in order without delay, and after kissing the hand of Ovando and thanking him for the honor, joined Esquivel at the head of his company. The historian Herrera says that Juan de Esquivel, in addition to being commander-in-chief, was captain of the soldiers from Santiago province, Juan Ponce of those from Santo Domingo, and Diego de Escobar of those from Concepcion de la Vega. In all there were about four hundred men, most of them veterans, accustomed to warfare with the Indians.

Ponce de Leon was profuse in his thanks to the governor, without a doubt; but he must have regretted leaving the vicinage of the insular court, where alone he found congenial society that reminded him of what he had known in far-away Spain. He had won and wedded, it is said, one of the noble dames who came out in Ovando's train, and a child had blessed their union, so it must

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have been hard to leave the home he had provided for them in the capital and march off to the wars again. He was married, it is true; but, so far as the world knows Juan Ponce de Leon, the romanticism that surrounds him is of another sort than that which centres about an affair of the heart, or of love. He appears ever the stern soldier, with his heart encased in an armor as impenetrable as that which protected his body.

May we not attempt to picture him, as he stands before his superior, Ovando, meekly receiving his commands? "Son Juan," the governor is saying, "I have taken thee from thy soldiering and made thee in effect adelantado (though without royal sanction), because I have perceived in thee a capacity for greater things. Thou hast wielded thy sword well, Son Juan; but, on reflection, what hast thou gained by all these years devoted to the wars? Except for occasional plunder, of which I can hardly believe thou hast much left, nothing hath it availed thee, and thou'rt now past forty years of age, with wife and child to think about. Thy family in Spain is a noble one; but thou—what hast thou done to perpetuate its glory?"

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“Nay, do not blush”—as the swarthy cheek of the soldier crimsoned with shame—
“thou’rt not the kind that looks beyond the present duty, which is enough for thee to know, letting the future care for itself. Hence, I have selected thee as my lieutenant, or, in fact, military governor, in this heathen province of Higüey, for I know that upon thee I can depend. The sole fault thou mayst be guilty of is leniency, which, let me impress upon thee, will be lost upon those children of Satan, misnamed by the Admiral, Columbus, my predecessor, ‘*Indios*,’ or natives of the Indies. Stretch their necks whene’er occasion offers, and crack their bones as pastime every morning, so thou wilt be respected by them as their master; else wilt thou regret that I, Nicolas de Ovando, have appointed thee military governor of Higüey and all contiguous country in the east.”

Seldom had the grim governor unbent to such an extent as to *tutear* (or treat familiarly, by “theeing” and “thouing”) his subordinate, Juan Ponce, mere captain of a company; but his extended speech on this occasion, as well as his action in conferring upon him this much-coveted position, showed

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that he took a kindly interest in the modest soldier. Covered with confusion, Juan Ponce seized the great man's hand and reiterated his thanks; then, as the governor's attitude once more stiffened into its accustomed rigidity, he bowed low, with helmet doffed, and backed himself out of the room.

VI

CAPTURE OF COTUBANAMA

1504

“FIRE and sword! Fire and sword!” were the terse and brutal orders of Ovando to Esquivel. “Whoever is left, Juan Ponce is to govern them; but he cannot govern the cacique, so he must die! But, sooth, do not kill him in the field, if it be possible to bring him alive to the capital. I fain would see him hang by the neck, the scoundrel, and so see thou to it, Juan de Esquivel, that I have that pleasure.”

“*Si, Señor Gobernador*” (Yes, Sir Governor), replied the captain, “that pleasure you shall have, of a verity. But,” he added, *sotto voce*, to Juan Ponce, as he dropped his sword into its scabbard and turned on his heel to leave, “first we must catch the hare, meseems. Not a score of my soldiers can hold him.”

“There are more ways of catching a hare

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than by stepping on its tail," answered Juan Ponce. "'*A carne de lobo, diente de perro,*' (To wolf's flesh, dog's tooth) Juanito; you know the proverb."

"Ay, forsooth. The hounds shall be set on his trail; but they might rend him mortally. And should he die before I could get him to the governor, I misdoubt but he might kill me, for he hath set his heart upon torturing this cacique of Higüey."

"But do not exterminate them wholly, those people of Higüey," rejoined Juan Ponce. "For, consider, what avail if I be ruler of a province without any inhabitants!"

"Certes, so thou'rt to be adelantado! I had forgotten. Sooth, the governor might have done worse than have given me that appointment. I am tired of this constant marching over the country—fording rivers, climbing mountains, and always killing and killing. But I'll leave thee some subjects, Juanito; if not of the men, some women and children, for I'm weary of slaying such—or, what is the same, ordering my men to do it."

"And I," said Ponce de Leon. "Not a child or a woman have I slain this many a day. Notwithstanding the governor saith

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these Indians have no souls, and that it is no sin to slay them, I am of a different opinion. As adelantado, I shall endeavor to mitigate somewhat the sufferings of these poor people—that is, provided I be allowed to do so.”

“Well may you put in that proviso,” said Esquivel, with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. “I doubt if the devil himself be such a hater of mankind in general, and these poor wretches in particular, as our lord and master, Don Nicolas de Ovando. But this talk is treason, and were he to hear of it, off might go our heads—not only civil, but actual.”

The two officers were then riding slowly at the head of their troops, being among the few who were mounted. The soldiers were trudging wearily, yet without complaint, though their heavy armor was a “load for a mule,” as they were wont to say; never to mention the heat of the sun, which, in that tropical island, beat down with terrible force. They were obliged to ford a great many rivers, some they were forced to swim, and at night to camp wherever dry land might be found. Their fare was coarse, consisting mainly of what the country afforded by a hasty ravage, such as maize, yucca, *agé*, or peppers,

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and occasionally a sylvan animal known as the aguti—for of domestic fowl or quadrupeds the natives had no stock.

At the end of four or five days' marching the exhausted army entered the province of Higüey, where their presence was made known to the widely scattered Indians by great signal-smokes, which rose from numerous hills. These signals indicated that the natives were alert and probably prepared—as well as they might be—for the war, which Cotubanama knew to be inevitable. The Indians seemed to have been withdrawn from the sea-coast and concentrated in the mountains. The land rose to a great elevation, in vast terraces, with walls of rock almost perpendicular, with intervals of red soil, which was extremely fertile and produced abundant crops of food plants.

Although their province was on three sides surrounded by the sea, the inhabitants of Higüey were mostly mountaineers, and upon the advent of the Spaniards all became so temporarily, abandoning their villages in the littoral and hastening to the higher country. In the caverns and chasms of the mountains they made places of refuge for the women and children, while the

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warriors, as before, tried to make a stand in the lowlands. The first that were captured were without leaders, their caciques having gone to the mountains; but no amount of torture—and the cruel Spaniards applied it without mercy—could force them to reveal the hiding-places of their chiefs.

The first town the Spaniards entered, on a broad plateau flanked by rugged terraces, was deserted; but the second, still farther up, was occupied by a host of naked warriors, who seemed resolved to defend it to the last. Their yells were frightful to hear, their darts and arrows fell in showers; but at the first fire of the Spaniards, from their cross-bows and arquebuses, they took to flight, without waiting to engage the enemy at close quarters. They fled; yet they were brave enough and fierce enough, for such of the wounded as could not get away stood unflinchingly until the Spaniards reached them, when they tore the arrows from their wounds and hurled them in the faces of the foe as the swords or lances pierced their bodies.

As the invaders pressed onward, driving before them herds of fugitives, which ever and anon they massacred by hundreds, when their progress was impeded by them, Juan

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Ponce must have felt, indeed, that at the last he would have no people to govern—as he had already surmised. He urged Esquivel to hasten the end by securing Cotubanama, whose captivity or death, he was assured, would terminate resistance and bring the war to a conclusion. Despite his professed disinclination for slaughter, Commander Esquivel allowed his men to indulge in it to their hearts' content. But he, too, was desirous of taking the cacique, and (more because the slaying of innocent non-combatants delayed the march than from motives of mercy) he ordered the soldiers to stay their hands awhile.

They were then approaching the town in which Cotubanama resided in time of peace, and it was possible he might still be there. Two trails led to it, one so open and clear of obstacles that the old campaigners, Esquivel and Ponce, were at once suspicious of an ambush; the other obstructed by fallen trees, but nevertheless chosen by the soldiers. Progress through the forest was rendered doubly toilsome by impediments thrown in the way by the Indians; but doubtless many lives were saved by the taking of this route, as the savages in am-

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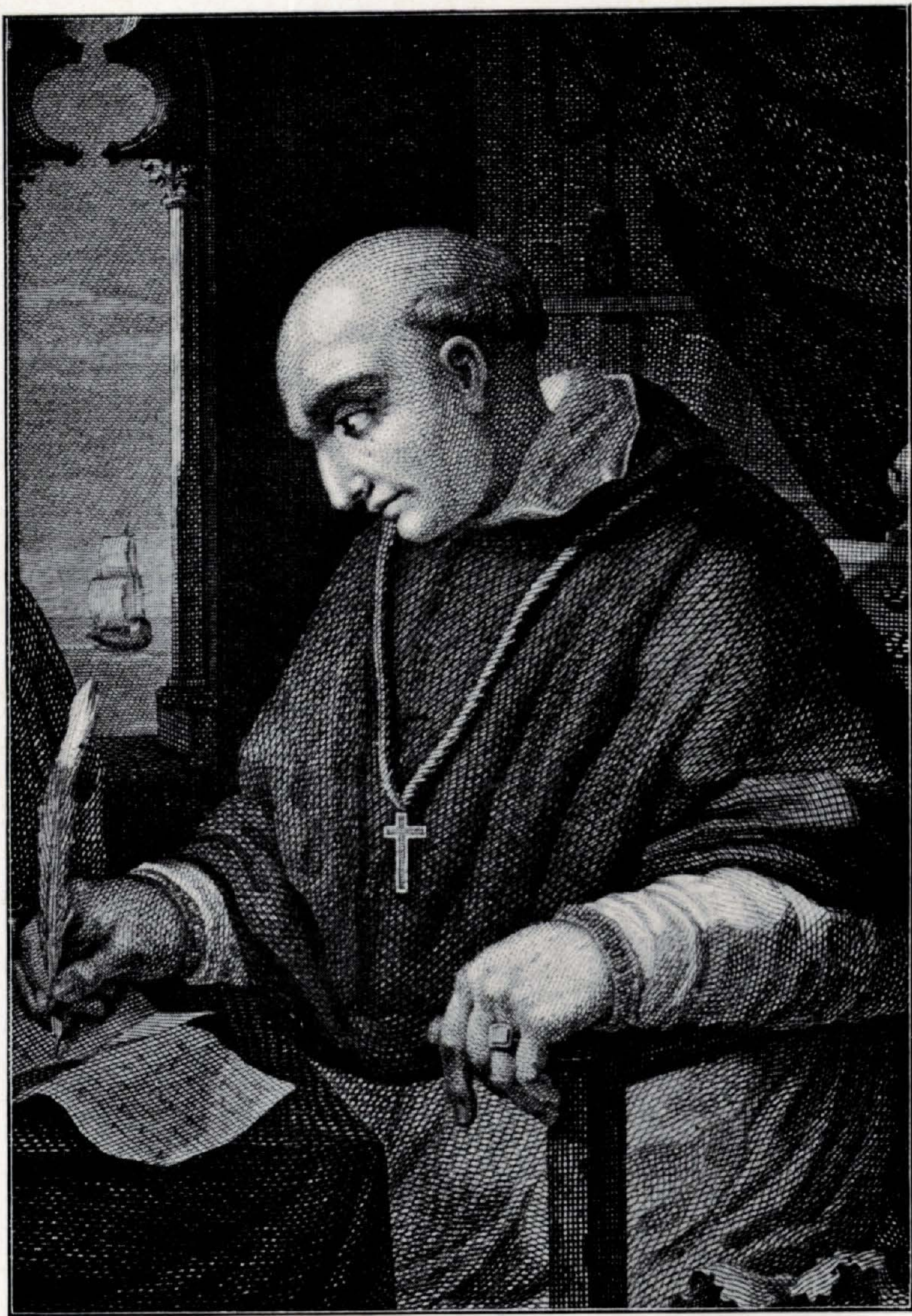
bush were cleverly flanked, and compelled to retreat towards the town. Here they made a stand from about noon till night, assailing the Spaniards with arrows, darts, and stones, fighting with great fury; but with their crude weapons, and destitute of defensive armor, even of clothing, they could not withstand the foe. As darkness fell, the shower of missiles slackened, then ceased entirely; the yells died away, and through the forest surrounding the village the savages silently retreated.

They were led by Cotubanama, in the fight and in the retreat; but though he was seen by the Spaniards, his giant frame towering above the heads of the warriors, the wily chieftain succeeded in making good his escape. He was promptly pursued the next day, but by that time had obtained such an advantage that it was weeks before his last retreat was discovered. Esquivel, now aroused to fury, his wolfish instincts dominant, refused to listen to Juan Ponce, who represented that the spirits of the people were broken, and it was doubtful if they ever made another stand. He entreated the commander to give over the pursuit, and to send out messengers inviting the scattered

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fugitives to return to their villages, proffering pardon to all except Cotubanama. Thus the cultivation of the soil could be carried on, the terrified Indians as well as the Spaniards could bind up their wounds, and peace prevail again.

The good Las Casas, who was then a young man and accompanied this expedition, united his pleadings with those of the adelantado, but all without avail. Esquivel became a veritable maniac in his fury against the Indians. He caused them to be hunted down, group by group, one by one, and all were killed as fast as they were captured, even the aged and feeble, women and children, when found in the caves to which they had fled for safety. Mere killing, even murder by wholesale, did not satisfy these fiendish Spaniards, but they devised the most ingenious methods of torture. They erected gibbets in long rows, and upon these hung their captives, in such a manner that their feet touched the ground and their torments were prolonged. Thirteen Indians were thus hanged one day, in honor, the blasphemous ruffians stated, of "our blessed Saviour and his twelve apostles," and while the helpless victims were still alive they



BARTHOLOMEW DE LAS CASAS

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hacked and slashed them with their swords, merely to gratify their thirst for blood.¹

These things Juan de Esquivel allowed to be done in order that the surviving natives might be terrorized into submission and reveal the hiding-place of Cotubanama; but, to their credit be it stated, no Indian was found so recreant to his chief as to betray him. By accident, Esquivel finally learned that he had left the mountains and returned to Saona, where, with wife and children and some chosen warriors, he was hiding in a cavern. Leaving Juan Ponce in command of the main army, Esquivel took with him fifty soldiers and embarked in a caravel for Saona, where, as he went over in the night, he landed without being discovered by the cacique. Two Indian spies were captured, and from them the Spaniards learned that Cotubanama was concealed in a cavern not far distant. The brutal Esquivel drove a poniard into the breast of one of the spies, and, while he lay quivering in the agonies of

¹ “*Yo mismo vi alli queman a infinitas gentes; atormentar y despedazar a otras, y hacen esclavos a los que de zaban vivos. Son tantos las particularidades de aquellos matanzas, que necesitaria yo muchos libros si quisiera expresarlas.*”—Las Casas.

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death, commanded the other to lead the way. The terrified Indian dared not refuse, but, before the cacique's place of concealment was reached, suddenly darted to one side, and, leaping over a precipice, was dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

Though rugged and forest-covered, the island was not so large that the chief could remain there long in hiding, and the Spaniards scattered in search of him. One Juan Lopez, a man of powerful physique, dashed ahead of his companions up the steep, and found himself suddenly confronted by a file of warriors. They were in a defile with overhanging trees, and if they had not lost courage by this unexpected apparition of a mailed soldier, dropped as if from the clouds, they might have killed him with their arrows. But they stepped aside, incredible as it may seem, and behind them was revealed the giant chieftain himself, with bent bow and a three-pronged arrow drawn to the head. He did not have time to speed it, however, for the brave Lopez darted in and slashed him with the sword he carried, at which Cotubanama cried out, "Do not kill me, for I am Juan de Esquivel."

He seized the Spaniard by the throat, and

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would have strangled him outright had not the noise of the struggle been heard by his comrades, who hastened to the rescue just in time to save his life. They threw themselves upon the giant in a body, and by the weight of their armor bore him to the ground, where they held him, helpless and bleeding, until the arrival of Juan de Esquivel.

VII

JUAN PONCE, PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR

1505-1508

COTUBANAMA was bound and taken to a deserted Indian village, whence a trail was discovered leading to his secret hiding-place, in a vast cavern beneath impending cliffs. Here the Spaniards had expected to find his wife and family; but they had received intimation of the disaster that had overtaken the cacique, and quietly slipped away. In the cave were found many rude implements of warfare, such as stone axes, war-clubs, pikes made of seasoned wood with their points hardened in the fire, bows and arrows. Here also were found several Spanish swords, which had been brought as trophies by some Indians, who, taken and enslaved by the Spaniards, had risen upon their captors and, after slaying them, had escaped to Saona. Besides the swords were found the chains the Ind-

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ians had worn, and from which they had freed their limbs by filing them off with hard stones. With these chains the captive chief was manacled, and then was taken to the shore, placed aboard the caravel, and sent to Santo Domingo.

As may be imagined, the Spanish soldiers were overjoyed at getting the renowned Cotubanama in their power, and, as he had caused them so much trouble, they resolved to gratify their ferocious instincts by broiling him to death upon a wooden gridiron. No death less merciful would serve to allay their resentment against the fallen chieftain, whose sole crime consisted in a sturdy defence of his native land, and he would doubtless have been sacrificed in this inhuman manner had not Commander Esquivel interfered. He dared his soldiers' anger and opposed their barbarous purpose—not because he was inclined to be more merciful than they, but because of his promise to Ovando. Much as the common soldiers might have been delighted at witnessing the death-throes of their captive, much as Esquivel himself would have rejoiced to see Cotubanama writhing in the midst of flames—far more would it redound to their credit

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if they should send the chieftain to the arch-fiend, Ovando.

“Hold, comrades!” Esquivel commanded, as, having dragged the cacique to the shore, the soldiers busied themselves about the details of his execution. “Hold, I command ye! What would ye, deprive the governor of his long-cherished revenge? Know ye not that I have promised him the pleasure of torturing this captive—of sending him to his final account? Refrain, then, from proceeding further, my good men, with this matter. We have done *our* duty by taking him, and subduing the rebellion he caused; let us now win further favor of our lord and master by delivering to him this prisoner. Let the poor wretch remain on board the caravel, and we will go with him to the capital, there to witness his execution.”

There was vast grumbling over this speech by Esquivel, for the soldiers were amazed that he should interfere in the matter of applying torture to an Indian victim, having hitherto allowed them to proceed as they liked. Some were engaged in fashioning the “gridiron,” some were gathering fuel for the fire, others were sharpening their swords and lances, preparatory to gashing

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their victim as he lay broiling over the coals. They muttered and blasphemed; some of them complained that Ovando would not allow them to witness the tortures preceding the execution, he was so extremely selfish.

"He likes to gloat over the tortures all alone," said one of the soldiers. "He seems to think the flavor gone from them when shared by others. I would wager my year's pay—and it is now six months overdue—that he tortures our captive deep in the dungeon, with nobody present but the executioner."

And so it was, for when, after sullenly acquiescing in the scheme of their commander, the soldiers had accompanied the captive to the capital, they were denied the privilege of witnessing the torturing process; though, indeed, they were allowed to guard the scaffold upon which Cotubanama was hanged.

Juan de Esquivel delayed his departure for the city of Santo Domingo only long enough to advise his coadjutor, Ponce de Leon, as to the course he should pursue with the conquered people, and set such of the soldiers in motion for the land journey

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homeward as were not detailed to serve with the adelantado. Then he sailed away in the caravel, leaving to Juan Ponce the government of the province. With the capture of Cotubanama all resistance ceased, and with his death on the scaffold all hopes of the natives were suffocated. For he was the last of the caciques, the last of five native sovereigns, all of whom had been discovered by the Spaniards ruling their subjects wisely and happily, but had, more or less directly, suffered death at their hands.

Ponce de Leon had urged Esquivel to allow him charge and control of Cotubanama, as thereby he hoped to secure, through him, the confidence of his former subjects; but the creature of Ovando refused. "Be content, my little governor," he said, "that I leave you people enough to form a community, over which you may rule—a community without a cacique, consequently without a centre of disaffection. There is no other like this savage Cotubanama, and soon after our arrival in the capital, methinks, there will be no great cacique at all left in the island, for he is the last of his race, and the governor will not be able to prevent himself from exterminating it. For,

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as thou knowest, Juanito, our lord, Don Nicolas de Ovando, hath a double, and that double is the devil, who urgeth him to commit the atrocities of which we know."

"He hath a devil, say you?" replied Ponce de Leon. "Then, sooth, what, in the name of the saints, hast thou, Juan de Esquivel? Judged by thy works, a legion of devils, and no less!"

Juan Ponce was ever blunt and plain-spoken, and now that he had become adelantado, with no one present to command him, he might well indulge himself in language that expressed his feelings, which had been overwrought of late. His companion winced, but he replied without trace of ill-feeling: "Mayhap. I myself cannot account for my actions, which, of a truth, have not been such as the saints might commend. But thou hast an opportunity, my adelantado, of showing what can be wrought from this raw material, the population of Higüey. It is not so bad as it might be, and having no head, it will look up to thee to supply that deficiency."

It was as the experienced Esquivel had said it would be: After his departure, such was the paralysis of the body politic in

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Higuey, caused by the terrible punishment the rebels had received, that Juan Ponce found little use for the few soldiers left with him to enforce his orders. He first busied himself at healing, so far as he could, the wounds caused by war. He established hospitals in which the sick and wounded might be treated, and though they were poorly equipped, owing to the opposition of Ovando to his plans for ameliorating the wretched condition of his people, they were instrumental in restoring to health many an Indian who might otherwise have died of the injuries inflicted by the adelantado's former comrades in arms.

The poor souls seemed to forget the injuries they had received, and, remembering only the favors at the hands of Juan Ponce de Leon, became his abject slaves. The possession of authority, by which he was enabled to carry out schemes of his own initiative, broadened his nature and caused his heart to expand with sympathy for the oppressed. Relieved from the evil dominance of Ovando, which allowed his better feelings scope for action, Juan Ponce turned his attention to the meek and mournful natives, whose last struggle against their

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oppressors had exhausted their resources and left them in mute despair. Formerly they had led a life of perfect happiness, knowing no wants which their simple existence created that could not be supplied by bountiful nature. They were indolent and ease-loving, adapting themselves to the climate, and working only in the cool hours of dawn and dusk. The noontide hours were devoted to rest, in the hammocks which their ancestors had invented, stretched between trees which, perchance, might be laden with delicious fruits. In the evening they danced to the music of rude instruments, and sang in unison the native *areytos*, or ballads, which commemorated the traditions of their race.

The coming of the Spaniards had changed the lives of the Indians, so that, even though those of Juan Ponce's province were not compelled to labor in the mines to any great extent, and most of such families as had survived intact were allowed to live together, or near one another, they were sullen, silent, and despairing. The forests no longer rang to their shouts, the fields and dwellings to their songs, for their spirits were broken, their hearts were bleeding. Even the children were mournful and mute.

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Fortunately for Juan Ponce, there were few mines in his province, and thus he was not tempted by greed of gold to send his subjects into the bowels of the earth, there to wear out their lives in unending misery. But the country was fertile, and as the Spaniards were compelled to subsist upon the products of the land, which were nutritious and varied, the adelantado soon found a way of forcing the utmost available from the Indians' labor. He kept all the adults at work in the field—all that were able to labor—and gradually brought under cultivation a vast region, with fields of golden maize miles in extent. The native fruits were found and cultivated, such as the *anana*, or pineapple, the *cacao*, or cocoa, the *aguacate*, or alligator-pear; and the few sylvan creatures suitable for food were sought out for the table: the *guana*, or white-fleshed lizard, the *aguti*, or coney, wild parrots, and wild hogs. Such an abundance of fruits and vegetables, fish from the sea, shrimps from the rivers, birds and quadrupeds from the forest, had the adelantado supplied to him, that he really revelled in the bounties of nature. Though at first he was restless and lonesome, from lack of congenial companions,

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he rapidly grew into his work (or settled into the harness, as he expressed it), and by the time the returns from field and forest, sea and river, came to him in a bounteous stream, he seemed more than content to remain in Higüey for the remainder of his life.

After ranging the province with his band of soldiers, more for the purpose of ascertaining its resources than for pacification—as there was no disturbance worthy the name of rebellion—Juan Ponce finally settled his military establishment at a point in the eastern country, within view of the channel that separates the island from Porto Rico. It was at or near the meeting-place of rivers, with mountains behind it, and a fair plain before. To-day it is approximately located on the map, and its founders' name perpetuated by the name of "Salva Leon de Higüey." So small a place is the settlement that succeeded to Juan Ponce's establishment that some maps omit it altogether, and few are the travellers that ever reach it, for the roads are terrible, the rivers to ford are many, and the habitations of civilized people few and far between.

The last of the Indians passed away many

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years ago, and their places were filled by negro slaves imported from Africa, whose descendants now occupy the country where roamed the heroic Caonabo and Cotubanama. Hardly a trace remains of Spanish occupation: the Spaniards themselves were expelled long ago; Salva Leon is a miserable settlement, and Saona is desolate.

VIII

INVASION OF PORTO RICO

1508-1509

HOW long Juan Ponce de Leon would have been satisfied with the quiet, uneventful life of a provincial governor in Higüey it is difficult to say, though, as already hinted, he seemed quite contented. The months lengthened into years, and still peace prevailed in the province, which was so quiet, and so far distant from the capital, that Governor Ovando almost forgot its existence. Now and again, to be sure, he would say to Juan de Esquivel, in a grimly jocular way: "What news from the adelantado? Methinks he must have found treasure, which he desires to keep secret from us; else why should he not more frequently communicate?"

Juan Ponce had found a treasure—the treasure of content, the like of which would never be known to Ovando, nor to Esquivel,

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for they had too many stains of murder on their souls. He and his military family lived apart from others, on the hill of *Alta Gracia*, or Highest Thanks, whence they could sweep their gaze over a broad and beautiful landscape, bounded north and south by mountains, west by hills, and east by the watery horizon of the Mona Channel. Above this eastern horizon, hanging in the sky like blue and misty clouds, entrancing in their loveliness, rose the mountains of *Boriquen*, or Porto Rico, an island which had been known to the Spaniards for years, but had never been explored. On his second voyage, in 1493, Don Christopher Columbus, coming up from the islands of the Caribbees, first espied the mountain-tops of Boriquen. As he approached them the exquisite contours were revealed that have charmed many voyagers since: conical peaks, rounded hills, curves and crescents, melting into fair and verdant valleys, clothed in the wondrous vegetation of the tropics.

Columbus was then in the heyday of his career, for he never again commanded so large a fleet, never again sailed in the society of cavaliers so exalted in rank as those who accompanied him on that second voyage to

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the West Indies in 1493. He was then on his way back to Hispaniola, where he had left forty men in a fortress, on the north coast of the island. Never a soul of the forty did he find alive (by-the-way, let it be said), for all were massacred by the cacique to whom we have already alluded in these pages — Caonabo the Carib, Lord of the Golden House. But the admiral, as Columbus was then entitled to be called, did not know of this disaster. His gallant fleet swept on, coasting the southern shores of Boriquen, and all on board, filled with hopes of fortunes awaiting them in the islands, exclaimed with delight at the beauty of this insular paradise.

Sweeping around the southwestern point of the island, the fleet was finally brought to anchor in a large and beautiful bay, now known as Aguadilla, near the northwestern extremity of Boriquen. Here a broad beach was discovered, near which, gushing like a fountain from a natural basin surrounded by tropical vegetation, was a spring of purest water. This place Columbus called *Aguada*, or the watering-place, because he availed himself of the abundant supply, in close proximity to the shore, to water his ships.

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Upon the island itself he bestowed the name of San Juan, and the beauty of the bay so impressed him that he called it the Rich Port, from which we have San Juan de Puerto Rico, or Saint John of the Beautiful Port. The proper spelling of the name is Puerto Rico, and not Porto, which is Portuguese, or bastard English, but not Spanish, though recent usage seems to sanction it.

The Indian name of the island was *Boriquen* (latterly by the islanders called *Borinquen*); but of the aborigines Columbus seems to have seen few, if any, for he did not tarry to trade with them, but sailed for Hispaniola as soon as his ships were watered from the forest fountain. He never returned to the island, and it escaped the attention of others until about the year 1508, when its misty mountains beckoned to Juan Ponce de Leon, then governor of Higüey and residing at Alta Gracia. One day, in the summer of 1508, his major-domo came to him with an Indian who had crossed the channel, or Mona Passage, from Boriquen, in a canoe. "Señor Adelantado," he said, "here is a Boriqueño who has something for barter which looks to me like gold. He did not procure it in this island, but in that from

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which he came, and he says that there is much more—that the river sands are full of it, in fact.”

The Boriqueño, or native of Boriquen, was closely questioned by Juan Ponce as to the auriferous locality, and in answer pointed to the distant mountains. He had a pebble veined with gold, and some grains of goodly size, which he said he obtained from the sands of a river called the Zebuco. These specimens he generously offered to the adelantado, and the latter accepted them, giving him in exchange some cascabels, which tinkling trinkets appeared to please him more than the gold. Asked if he would guide the Spaniards to the river containing the gold, the simple Indian said that he was willing, but that he must first obtain the consent of his cacique, whose name was Guaybana. He was sure, however, that this consent would not be withheld, for the cacique was anxious to become acquainted with the white men, of whose presence in Quisqueya (Hispaniola) he had heard, and whose ships he had seen sail past his island.

The adelantado was no longer content to dwell in his province of Higüey, for the mountains of Boriquen, with their golden-

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sanded rivers, seemed to offer him the fortune which thus far he had failed to accumulate. They pertained, moreover, to a large and presumably fertile island which had not yet come under Spanish domination, and why should not he be the first to seize upon and govern it, in the name of the king? He detained the Indian until a caravel could be made ready, and, with several trusty companions and an interpreter, set out from a small natural harbor near Cape Engaño for the bay of Aguadilla. The channel between the islands, known as the Mona Passage, was about fifty miles across, and by leaving at dusk the party of explorers reached Aguadilla at daybreak next morning. The Boriqueño's canoe had been taken along as a tender and the Indian himself as a guide; so the one served to bear the caravel's passengers through the surf to the beach, after the larger craft was anchored, and the other as master of ceremonies at the court of Guaybana.

The Indian cacique was more than a mere chief—he was a sovereign, ruling the whole island, and to him several other chiefs were tributary. When Columbus had visited the island he abandoned the coast at first view

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of the strangers, and hid himself in the forests, probably alarmed at the size of the fleet and number of people aboard it; but on the arrival of Juan Ponce, with a single small vessel, and accompanied by but a few armed men, he was found readily accessible. The Indian guide conducted the adelantado to a forest-covered hill, from the base of which the sparkling waters of the spring gushed forth, and there the residence, or *bokio*, of the cacique was found, beneath the spreading branches of an immense silk-cotton tree. Guaybana was reclining in a hammock, and around him were his wives and children, all vying in attentions to the King of Boriquen.

At a little distance were the dwellings of his subjects, on the verge of the forest, with well-cultivated gardens stretching to the bay. At the approach of the Spaniards the cacique rose and saluted them with a gesture, while his attendants fell apart and allowed them to come near him. He was naked, except for a cotton cloth around his loins; yet he bore himself with dignity and composure, as he received Ponce de Leon in full armor, with sword clanking at his side. A most imposing figure the adelantado made,

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with helm and corselet, greaves, and gauntlets, all of shining steel. The cacique and his attendants were lost in admiration of his resplendent presence, and the Indian maids, of whom there were many, shapely and comely, clasped their hands and gazed at him awe-stricken. They believed him descended from the heavens—a celestial being—and murmured beneath their breath: “*Cemi!* a God who has come from the sky.”

They were aroused from their stupor by a command from Guaybana, and promptly scattered in various directions. Some swept the mud floor of the bohio with brooms of twigs, others spread wild banana leaves on the ground, upon them placing piles of native fruits and vegetables, raw as well as cooked, while others still came from their storage-places in the forest with great calabashes full of *chicha*, and wine extracted from the sap of the palm-tree. The repast was quickly spread; at a signal from the king the attendants fell back, while host and guest entered the bohio and seated themselves upon heaps of palm leaves arranged around the food so plentifully provided.

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Guaybana had several wives, but nevertheless was obedient to his mother, a very handsome woman, whose daughters resembled her, being very comely and amiable. One of these fair princesses she would fain have bestowed upon Juan Ponce, as a pledge of their amity; but the soldier informed her, as well as he could through the Indian interpreter, that he already had a wife in Hispaniola, who would be displeased, and therefore he must decline the honor, though with thanks.

Silence reigned during the repast, but after it was over conversation was conducted through the interpreters, and the king exchanged names with his guest, in token of friendship. Nothing could exceed his hospitality, and in his desire to please Juan Ponce he took him nearly all over the island. Accompanied by a retinue of warriors, the two penetrated to the interior, where the mighty Luquillo mountain rises far above the general altitude of the range; they inspected vast fields of maize and yucca, filling fertile valleys; and finally, as the king came to understand that the greatest desire of his guest was to obtain gold, he took him to the auriferous streams.

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It had been a hard task for elderly and corpulent Juan Ponce to accompany the king in his tour of inspection while wearing his armor, beneath the ardent rays of a tropical sun. One by one he shed the various pieces of his coat-of-mail, until at last he was divested of it almost entirely. Then, as compared with the athletic cacique, he shrank into something like insignificance, and the Indian maidens no longer likened him to their gods.

All his toils, however, and all the implied disparagement of his high qualities, he willingly endured, on account of the shining treasure hidden in the sands of the rivers, for it was incalculable, he believed, and inexhaustible. From two of the mountain streams, the Zebuco and the Manatuabon, he and his companions took gold, in grains and nuggets, in such quantities that they danced for joy on beholding it. Their actions greatly amused King Guaybana, who stood by, looking on with a smile; but if he had realized what he was doing in holding out this golden lure to the Spaniards, he would surely have killed them on the spot. They were wholly in his power; they were even then scheming to invade his

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island with a force sufficient for its subjugation; but he allowed Juan Ponce to depart unharmed, with all the gold he had found in the streams, while his companions remained to await his return.

IX

SUBJUGATION OF BORIQUEN

1509

RETURNING to Hispaniola, Juan Ponce laid before Ovando tangible evidence of Porto Rico's riches, in the grains of gold and nuggets which he had obtained from its streams. The governor was delighted, and authorized his lieutenant to raise a force of soldiers sufficient for its subjugation. Before proceeding in force, however, he was recommended to return and make a complete reconnoissance of the entire island, while the cacique remained friendly, and ascertain the best points for erecting forts, as well as for settlement, and traffic with the natives.

Although the Spaniards despised trade as a profession, and the hidalgos considered themselves disgraced if they but engaged in it for a while, they recognized its necessity in dealing with the Indians. From his long experience in Hispaniola, where the Indians

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spoke the same language and had the same habits as those of Boriquen, Juan Ponce was peculiarly well-fitted to commence an establishment among them, by which the Spaniards should gain a foothold. After that they asked nothing more, for wherever they went, they never stopped until they had gained entire possession of whatever country they invaded.

Ponce de Leon must have known this; still, though engaged in an act of perfidy towards the hospitable Guaybana, he did not hesitate to place himself completely in his power. Once again he sailed across the channel, and landed at Aguada, but this time he was accompanied by a small body of soldiers, and also by his wife and child. The authority for this statement is the veracious historian, Oviedo, who says, in his *Historia General de las Indias*, "Captain John Ponce returned to Sanct. Johan and took with him his wife and daughter."

Knowing Indian character so well, Juan Ponce had no hesitation in placing his little family in charge of the queen-mother, while he and Guaybana went off on the reconnoissance of the island, as proposed by Ovando. And, as the cacique and the Spaniard had

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exchanged names, the mother of the former and the wife of the latter did the same, the queen calling herself Doña Inez, and bestowing Indian names upon the children. After completing his survey, Ponce de Leon returned once again to Hispaniola, leaving his dear ones with their kind protectors, fully assured that they would be cared for and safe-guarded during his absence, which he promised should be short.

He took leave of them on the beach at Aguada, fully expecting to return within a few weeks, at farthest; but when he reached Santo Domingo, was shocked and surprised to find that Governor Ovando had been recalled to Spain, and in his place another, who was not so favorably disposed towards him and his scheme of conquest. This other was no less a personage than Don Diego Columbus, son of Christopher the admiral, and as Ovando had notably oppressed his father and deprived him of vast possessions, it was not to be supposed that he would hold in esteem any of his friends and favorites. He had friends of his own, in fact, whom he purposed to advance to all the high places of trust and emolument, among which he included the governorship

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of Boriquen. Juan de Esquivel happened to be in Hispaniola at the time of his arrival, and being as agile in shifting his allegiance as he was alert in pursuing the Indians, was appointed governor of Jamaica; but Juan Ponce, being absent, and without friends at court to make intercession for him, was not only ignored, but frowned upon severely.

As Ovando had come to the West Indies with the largest fleet, so Don Diego Columbus had brought with him the most extensive suite of cavaliers and dames of high degree; for he purposed setting up a court that should dazzle all beholders with its magnificence. He had recently married a lady related to King Ferdinand, Doña Maria de Toledo, through whose influence with the court he had secured the appointment as viceroy and the restitution of properties his father had lost by the machinations of Bobadilla and Ovando. He reared a stately palace upon the right bank of the Ozama; he built a castle, towered and battlemented, and he established in this city of Santo Domingo, founded by his uncle Bartholomew, the first vice-regal court in America. He had been deprived of his rights for many years; his father had died poor and neglected;

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when at last he came into possession of his own, he resolved to make amends for that long period of poverty and abuse.

He had an exaggerated notion of his hereditary rights and privileges, even going the length of opposing the crown itself in his pretensions. Thus it came about that, when he learned of Porto Rico's riches, and the great desire among the conquistadores for appointments there, he took the matter into his own hands; though there was doubt as to whether it were not the king's prerogative. Honest Juan Ponce was set aside, as having been the friend of Ovando, and as governor of the island he appointed one Juan Ceron, with Miguel Diaz as his lieutenant. Juan Ceron seems to have been an unknown adventurer, but Miguel Diaz was none other than the Spaniard who had been instrumental in bringing about the settlement at the mouth of the Ozama.

When the only Spanish settlement in the island was at Isabella, on the north coast, in the time of Don Christopher's reign, Diaz, a common soldier, deserted and fled for protection to the mountains, where he found refuge with a female cacique. She gave him shelter, and more, for, when told that the

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Spaniards valued the yellow metal, gold, above all other things on earth, she led him to a region where it abounded. This region was at the headwaters of a tributary of the Ozama, and the result was, after Miguel Diaz had been pardoned on account of the gold he took to Don Bartholomew Columbus, the founding of Santo Domingo, as the nearest good port to the mines.

So Miguel Diaz and his friend went over to govern the island which Columbus had discovered and Ponce de Leon exploited. Seeing no other course to pursue, and especially in view of his wife and children being already on the island, Juan Ponce fell into the ranks, and went as a common soldier in the expedition which he had hoped and expected to command. There was another also, who had equally high pretensions with him as to Boriquen, and this was one Cristoval de Sotomayor, who had come out with a commission from the king for governing Porto Rico and building a fortress there. He had not urged his claims when he found Don Diego unalterably opposed to interference by the king, and, like Juan Ponce, joined the throng of adventurers who swarmed into the island after Juan Ceron.

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Comparing these two, Oviedo says in effect: "When Juan Ponce was a page in the service of Pero Nuñez de Guzman, before he had come to the Indies, the latter could not boast a hundred thousand maravedis income; but he came of an illustrious lineage, and later rose to a high position under the illustrious infante Don Fernando. That is to say, that between the two, Ponce and Sotomayor, there was little to choose as to their previous position and the richness of their blood; but the former had the name of being an hidalgo and he also had the appearance of one who might rise to the great height which he afterwards attained."

Owing to his experience in handling troops and Indians, his great ability, and his honesty, Ovando had placed confidence in him as governor of Higüey, and wished him to occupy the same position in Boriquen. A few months after the expedition had sailed, in fact, there came from Spain indubitable proof that the late governor still held to this belief, and of his influence with the king, for Ferdinand, at his solicitation, sent out a commission to Ponce de Leon as governor of Porto Rico, at the same time hinting to Don Diego that he might inter-

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fere only at his peril. Realizing that his sovereign was in a temper not to be trifled with, Don Diego withdrew his support from Ceron, leaving him to get out of the dilemma the best way he could. In short, as soon as Ponce learned that he was actually governor by royal appointment, he took command without consulting the wishes of his former superior, and as he and Diaz objected, arrested and sent both as prisoners to Spain.

Governor Ponce found his family safe, in the care of the queen-mother, Doña Inez; but the good Guaybana, he was told, had fallen ill and died, a firm friend of the Spaniards to the last. What became of the noble female who had been so serviceable, who had bestowed upon her guests the most generous hospitality, is not known; but her second son, Agueybana, succeeded to his brother, and, having greater perception than Guaybana, was not so well disposed towards the strangers as the elder members of his family. Soon after he found himself firmly intrenched in the island, Ponce de Leon followed the custom of his countrymen everywhere in the West Indies at that time, and began to apportion the natives among his friends in repartimientos. He had not a thought but

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that these Indians were his vassals, given into his possession by a wise Providence; but to the claims of humanity he gave no heed; to the suggestion that he owed a debt of hospitality to Guaybana's people, he paid no attention.

Juan Ponce de Leon's hardness of heart brought about the usual occurrences, which shaped themselves into retribution for the oppressed natives. Despairing of getting rid of their taskmasters by peaceful means, they resolved upon a general insurrection and massacre; and this was not long after Juan Ponce had established himself at a point on the northern coast, which he called Caparra. The location here of the seat of his government shows how wrong-headed he could be, as clearly as his ungrateful conduct towards his former hosts, whose gracious acts of hospitality he requited by the imposition of heavy tasks and pressing demands for tribute. For Caparra was, of all places in the island, the least desirable as a location for a settlement, being about a league distant from the sea, and reached only by a horrible trail up a steep mountain-side. It cost more, the grumbling Spaniards were wont to say, to transport provi-

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sions over this league of road, from coast to mountain-top, than for the entire voyage from Spain. It was located here, however, on account of its contiguity to the gold region—a reason which had influenced Columbus in choosing the wholly unsuitable site for the first city founded by Europeans in America — Isabella, on the north coast of Hispaniola. The Spaniards were shortsighted in this respect, founding their towns and cities, as a rule, without regard to natural advantages, but with a view to the situation respecting the gold-mines.

Yes, Ponce de Leon was worse than wrong-headed, merely—he was mercenary, cruel, and oppressive. Now that he had a free hand he showed traits of his character which had been long suppressed or overshadowed by others, of necessity. After many years of vain striving he had at last secured the position of power which would give him wealth unlimited, provided he paid no heed to humanity's claims. He deliberately resolved upon the course to pursue, and he consistently held to it for years thereafter, without regard to the innocent Indians he harried and murdered, whom he considered no more than the earth beneath his feet.

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What an opportunity he had for gaining not only wealth but the affection of the natives, who nobly despised mere lucre, and cared not for the so-called precious metals. Friendship was more to them than gold, and hospitality than silver; yet the Spaniards could not appreciate, even if they could recognize, the noble qualities of these people. They, the incoming strangers, were the baser sort, for though they looked upon these naked Indians with contempt, the latter were as far above them as the heavens above the earth upon which they dwelled.

At first, as we have seen, the simple natives looked upon Juan Ponce and his soldiers as celestial beings, and were prone to revere them as such; but not a long time passed before their good opinion changed. It could not be otherwise, for the Spaniards treated them as they treated their cattle, except that they did not devour their flesh after they had killed them. The cannibals, the fierce Caribs, that came up from the Lesser Antilles and ravaged their island annually, were no worse than these Spaniards, nor even so much to be dreaded, for they invaded only a province at a time. They never remained long, either, but after

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their ravage went away, and the Boriqueños were free from invasion for another twelve-month. But these Spaniards came and remained, their numbers were being constantly added to by accessions out of the sea, and the despairing natives began to inquire whether they really were immortal. The Spaniards themselves told them so, and they had never yet seen one of them die. But again, if they were immortal—in other words, gifted of heaven—why should they display all the attributes of fiends?

Some of the shrewdest caciques became sceptical on this point, and assembled secretly in the forest for the purpose of deciding it, if possible. They finally arrived at the conclusion that the only way to test the Spaniards' immortality was to proceed to extremities on the person of some one whom fortune might throw in their way. But, in the language of the modern fable, "Who would bell the cat?"—or, in other words, catch the Spaniard. All shrank with horror from the mere suggestion, for all actually believed the foreigners supernatural, and likely, even if apparently killed, to restore themselves to life and take a terrible revenge.

There was one cacique, however, who was

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less superstitious than the others, and, as it happened, a Spaniard had sent him word that the next day he expected to cross his territory, and required carriers for himself and luggage. The name of this cacique was Brayogan, and he lived on the north coast, near the port of Rico. After talking earnestly with King Agueybana, who was present at the meeting in the forest, he departed for his bohio. There he went through the ranks of his followers, selecting with care a sufficient number of them to act as escort to the Spaniard on the morrow. They were all picked men, reliable men, but the cacique concealed himself in the forest where he could watch them when they met the Spaniard.

The white man came at the time indicated, borne in a litter on the shoulders of four Indians tottering from fatigue. They were glad when they saw fresh recruits awaiting them, and did not tarry long after delivering up their burden, but hastened back to their tribe. The white man arrogantly commanded the new carriers to take up their burden, which they did with an alacrity that should have aroused his suspicions.

Silently they bore him onward through

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the forest, until they came to the bank of a deep, swift river. They plunged in, one of them stumbled, and the litter was overturned. As the man rolled out they seized and held him under water—an hour or more they held him, until he was drowned beyond all peradventure. Then they dragged the lifeless body to the bank, where Cacique Bray-oan met them, and, after a glance at the corpse, remarked, "Well done, my children, for the man is dead!"

Still they would not trust the mere evidence of sight, but sat by the corpse until three days had passed, at the end of which there was no longer any doubt.

X

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AS the Indians pretended to the Spaniards that the death of their countryman was due to an accident, and as the latter had had no previous cause for suspicion against them, the affair was passed over without reparation being exacted. But dire were the consequences of this deed, for the Indians had at last discovered that their enemies were mortals like themselves, and feared no longer to attack them. The tidings travelled swiftly, until the island had been girdled with messengers and every sub-cacique informed. So long as it was practicable to carry the corpse of the unfortunate Spaniard, the Indians bore the hideous trophy from one tribe to another, and thus thousands were convinced that they had been deceived; the Spaniards were liars, and they were also mortal, vulnerable.

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Cacique Agueybana laid his plans in secrecy, visiting in person every chieftain, and arranging, so far as human foresight could, for an uprising that should enclose the settlers within a ring of flame. He himself had a special grievance, and was not only to give the signal for the massacre, but wreak vengeance upon the man to whom he had been assigned in repartimiento, Don Cristoval de Sotomayor. This cavalier had kept on good terms with Juan Ponce, and by him had been made alcalde mayor, or chief judge, of the island, and given the very province in which King Agueybana lived.

That he, a king, should be assigned by another to another as a slave, with all his family and tribe companions in servitude, was at first so astounding to Agueybana that he could not understand it. Unlike his brother, the unsuspecting and generous Guaybana, he had mistrusted the Spaniards and held aloof, but had committed no crime, had instigated no reprisals, until this unwarranted deprivation of his liberty aroused his rage and urged him to revenge. Don Cristoval, who had been selected as the first victim, was an easy master; but that did not mitigate his offence in the eyes of the out-

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raged cacique, whose ancestors had always been free and untrammelled forest-rangers, going and coming as they chose, without consent of anybody.

In the eyes of one of Agueybana's sisters, however, the gallant Sotomayor had found favor, for he was a noble cavalier, handsome and amiable, and, being unmarried, considered himself at liberty to contract an alliance with whatever dusky beauty he might fall in love with. Whatever his feelings towards Agueybana's sister, she was in love with him, and when she learned from her brother that Sotomayor's life was in danger, warned him to flee.

"Go, I beseech thee," she entreated her lover, "while there is yet time, for two days hence thou art marked to be slain! Thou dost not believe me? Then send some one of thy men disguised as an Indian, and let him listen to our warriors as they chant the areyto in the forest."

Don Cristoval laughed at her fears, but the princess was insistent; so he sent one of his men, stripped like an Indian and be-daubed with war-paint, to spy upon the conspirators, who met nightly in a forest not far from his house. The man performed

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the mission secretly, and, returning to Sotomayor, reported that he had seen hundreds of Indians in war-paint, assembled about a fire in the forest, where they had worked themselves into a fury by chanting the areyto, or ballad reciting the great deeds of their ancestors, and telling what they would do on the morrow.

Don Cristoval's fears were at last aroused, and he promised the princess to set out for Caparra in the morning, with a view to seeking assistance and protection. When morning came, however, he made the mistake of applying to Agueybana for Indians as guides and porters, thus betraying his plans to the cacique, who lost no time in laying an ambushade. Accompanied by four or five Spaniards, like himself armed only with sword and buckler, Sotomayor strolled carelessly through the forest, with the Indian carriers before and behind him. There was only an obscure trail to guide the party, known solely to the Indians, who finally led the Spaniards into a dense thicket of tree-ferns bordering a deep ravine. Suddenly, out of the shades of the tropical forest whistled an arrow, followed by another and another. Then the shrill war-whoop struck

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upon Sotomayor's ears, and he found himself surrounded by a score or more of savage warriors. He had hardly time to draw his sword and stand upon the defensive, when, with a blow from his war-club, Agueybana felled him to the ground, where he was set upon by others and quickly despatched. His companions were served in the same manner, and then the exultant Indians returned to the village of Sotomayor, which they set on fire that night and destroyed, slaying the Spaniards within it as they were made visible by the light of the flames. A few Spaniards succeeded in escaping, and, under the lead of Diego de Salazar, made their way through the forests to Caparra, where they found wary Ponce de Leon securely intrenched within a castle of his own construction on a cliff. He had already been informed of the massacre by a Spaniard, who had been overtaken by Agueybana in the woods, wounded, and left for dead, but who escaped by climbing a tree, where he remained till night, when he evaded his foes and finally reached Caparra with the dismal tidings.

Governor Ponce was too old a soldier to risk a general engagement with the host of

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Indians then in the field, estimated at fifteen or twenty thousand; but he sent a small detachment in search of Sotomayor, perchance he might be alive, which arrived at the scene of massacre too late to render assistance. The unfortunate Don Cristoval was found stretched out upon the ground, in full armor, with the Indian princess bending over him, weeping and lamenting. He and his comrades were hastily buried; then the detachment hastened back to Caparra, fearing pursuit by the cacique, whose warriors, the weeping princess told the commander, were gathering by thousands.

The fortress of Caparra was now the goal of all the Spaniards in the island, and it was also the intention of Agueybana, his sister said, to converge his warriors there. From every direction came the fleeing Spaniards, for the preconcerted uprising had been successful, and not a village remained that had been founded by the white men. Agueybana and his warriors served the Spaniards as Ovando had the caciques of Anacaona, setting their houses on fire, and cutting them down as they attempted to escape. More than a hundred Spaniards were killed in this uprising, which was one of the very

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few massacres that, viewed from the Indians' stand-point, was a great success.

Beleaguered within his fortress of Caparra, Governor Juan Ponce viewed with apprehension the gathering hordes of Indians bent upon exterminating the strangers who had treated them so harshly. He was not alarmed, and, in point of fact, held the Indians in contempt, for his experience in Hispaniola had shown him that they could not combat the white men except when vastly superior in numbers. But there had been in Hispaniola no such cacique as Agueybana, except perhaps Caonabo and Cotubanama, who were at last overthrown. Juan Ponce had no doubt of his ability to eventually defeat the rash cacique who had destroyed his villages and killed his settlers; but first he needed reinforcements, and sent to Hispaniola for them by several messengers, meanwhile grimly holding his own in the fortress, with an occasional foray to keep the savages from making an assault in force.

In his youth, Juan Ponce had met and fought with foes who were so far superior to these poor savages in adroitness and strategy, that encountering their attacks and outwitting their plans was mere child's play.

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In his campaigns against the Moors of Granada he had become versed in stratagem and ambuscade, and he applied his knowledge with such good effect that at last the besiegers grew exceeding wary. Dividing his little force of scant a hundred men into three bodies, which he placed under experienced captains, he sent them outside the fort alternately, to harry the foe, to entice them to attack, and then take them by ambuscade; to mass them in some place where they could be cut down by a concentrated fire from the arquebuses. At last this unceasing warfare grew so distressing that Agueybana withdrew from around the fortress and encamped at a distance, where he could concert in peace his plans for destroying the Spaniards.

It was not long before reinforcements arrived from Hispaniola, and then the governor took the offensive, sallying forth at the head of his troops in search of the foe. With more than five thousand warriors at his command, Agueybana was carelessly reposing in fancied security, when the crafty old soldier, Juan Ponce, fell upon him like a thunderbolt. He had a hundred men, and had left another hundred in the fortress to

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care for the women and children. With his centurions compacted like a living wedge, Governor Ponce split the Indian army in twain, and committed such slaughter that the survivors fled in wild dismay. Against the armor worn by the Spaniards, darts and arrows sent by the savages had no effect, and scarcely a man of Ponce's force was wounded, while hundreds went down before that phalanx in its panoply of steel.

Agueybana had imagined the Spaniards few in number, since so many had been massacred, and was prone to believe that, notwithstanding the evidence presented to the contrary, in the experiment conducted by Cacique Brayoan, they might be immortal, after all. The reinforcements had come without his knowledge, and he was taken unawares; but by no means dismayed, he resolved upon one last attempt to free his native land from the invaders. He sent to all the inferior caciques of Boriquen a command to assemble in his province of Mayaguez, and such a multitude responded that the Spaniards, when they saw them, were all but dismayed. Juan Ponce got news of their coming, and set out to meet them with his handful of men, but at sight of the vast

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army opposed to him, hesitated to attack in the open, and threw up a temporary fortification. There he awaited Agueybana, who, goaded to desperation by the thought that his enemy might escape in the darkness of night, then approaching, led his warriors in an assault as the sun went down.

Knowing how much depended upon depriving the Indians of their fighting head, or commander, Ponce de Leon cautioned his men to concentrate their fire upon the chief. The tall form of Agueybana was conspicuous, for he was a head higher than the average of his warriors, and in his mane of coarse black hair he wore a snow-white heron's plume. Calling an arquebusier to his side, the governor told him to have his matchlock ready to fire at the word from him. He was a sturdy soldier and the best shot in the army. Soon the surging sea of warriors covered the plain and broke against the frail fortification behind which the Spaniards were crowded, elbow to elbow. They were impatient to burst their bounds and attack the savages with sword and lance, but Juan Ponce restrained them.

"Nay," he said. "Wait till I give the word. First we must slay the chief; then

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the dispersing of this rabble will be an easy matter." He spoke calmly, his voice deep-toned and clear, so that all heard him, even above the roar of Indian drums, the shrill blasts of conch-shells, and the yells from a thousand throats.

At last Juan Ponce saw what he was looking for: a white heron plume dancing above the swarthy brow of Agueybana. The warriors had surrounded the fortification by this time, so that it was like an island in an ocean, but foremost of them all was the cacique. Ponce de Leon plucked his musketeer by the arm. "See, there he is," he said. "A hundred ducats for thee if thy shot be true." Resting his arquebus upon the topmost log of the barricade, the soldier calmly aimed his piece and deliberately applied the match. As the cacique was in rapid motion, and constantly shortening the distance that separated him from the marksman, the aiming of the arquebus required a cool head and practised eye. The arquebusier had both, as he soon showed, for immediately the flame shot forth Agueybana was seen to leap into the air, clutch frantically at his hair, then fall to earth.

"He hath it! He hath it!" shouted Juan

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Ponce, exultantly. "The chief is slain. Out, now, my gallant men, and at the savages with lance and sword!" The soldiers needed no second call, even as the warriors needed no spur to urge them to retreat when the tidings spread that their chief was dead. With howls and yells they swerved aside from the fortification, broke, and fled tumultuously, pursued by the Spaniards, at whose head was their veteran commander shouting like a madman.

Juan Ponce was at that time just fifty years of age, his sword-arm was as sinewy, his frame as robust, and his actions prompt and agile as when he was a youth and fought the Moors. He was a veteran by reason of experience, but not in years, he felt. His nature was hopeful, his plans far-reaching, and he set himself the task of reducing the island to subjection as blithely as if he were half of fifty years old rather than half a century.

The killing of Agueybana had broken the back of the war, and thereafter no great resistance was offered to the Spaniards. The natives of Porto Rico were by nature mild and peace-loving, like those of Hispaniola; but by having been subjected to the assaults

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of the fierce Caribs during many years, they had become hardy and warlike. Those cannibal sea-rovers had harassed them constantly, coming up from the southern islands in their war-canoes, ravaging the beautiful valleys, burning their huts, killing their warriors, and carrying away their women and children as victims for sacrificial feasts. But, as already remarked, the Spaniards were far worse than the cannibals, for while the acts of the latter were sometimes tempered with mercy, while they sometimes intermarried with the Boriqueños and joined their communities, the former were ever aliens and oppressors. The result of the invasion begun by Juan Ponce de Leon—the ultimate result, and it was not delayed many score years—was extermination. No descendant of that race discovered in Boriquen by Columbus; no descendant of that race found by him in Hispaniola—though it numbered millions in both islands—lives on earth to-day.

After their second defeat the Indians retired to their homes, and the Spaniards finally enslaved them all, the process having been initiated by the cavalier whose fortunes we are following, Juan Ponce de Leon.

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Slaves meant wealth, for they could be sold in Spain (notwithstanding laws and sentiment against the practice), and they were made to labor on the plantations, raising maize and yucca, eventually sugar-cane and coffee, so that the Spaniards became enriched thereby. As Juan Ponce was the first in authority to enslave the natives and profit by their labors—as to him was brought all the plunder for division between himself, the king, and his soldiers—within two years of his arrival in Boriquen he had amassed a princely fortune.

XI

THE ISLAND'S ABORIGINES

(1511)

WHILE no native of Porto Rico can boast that he is descended directly from any of the caciques of Boriquen, or has in his veins the unadulterated blood of the island's aborigines, there are to-day many of mixed blood whose ancestors were among the highest in the land. Among these, degenerates as they are, traditions have been preserved of the original population, which lead us to believe that it was more highly civilized than that of Hispaniola, Jamaica, or Cuba. Not alone traditions inform us of what these people were, but the remains they have left behind them show conclusively their status as compared with their insular neighbors of that period.

There have been unearthed, in various parts of Porto Rico, vessels of pottery, great stone stools, "mealing stones," beads, amu-

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lets, masks, and collars of stone, with many other implements of industry and art, not to mention of war, which have been pronounced the most beautiful of their kind in the world. The Boriqueños left behind no manuscripts, on bark or on parchment; no hieroglyphics, either carved or painted—no chronicles of any sort, in fact, save these products of their industry, some individual specimens of which must have taken a lifetime of patient labor to perfect.

In order to understand the people with whom Ponce de Leon came in contact, and for whose extermination he was in great measure responsible, we should see and examine their handiwork, as they themselves are non-existent, and no aboriginal artist has made and left for posterity any portrait of a native Boriqueño. Their pottery is the most profusely ornamented, the antiquarians say, of any that has been found in the West Indies, while there are several kinds of stone carvings that are absolutely unique. These are called, from their shape, "horse-collars" and "mammiiform stones." Imagine a veritable horse-collar carved out of solid stone! It was not intended for the purpose the name recently bestowed upon it would sug-

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gest, but for a use which no one living could surmise. It has to do with the religion, or more properly the superstition, of the natives, who had objects of this kind buried with them when they died. An Indian would spend all the leisure hours of a lifetime, it is said, laboriously carving this collar from the hard volcanic rock with which the island abounds, in order, merely, that it might be placed over his head when he was laid in the grave. Why did he do it? Because his priest, or medicine-man, the *buhiti*, who was usually a relative or near friend of the cacique, had told him to do so; otherwise—unless securely implanted in the grave, by means of this stone collar upon his breast, weighing half a hundred pounds — the devil would certainly fly away with him! That is, the Indian devil, who was not related to the white man's devil, though, like him, an evil spirit and a character to be avoided. With one of these stone collars over his head, the defunct owner, whether cacique or common soldier, might successfully defy the efforts of Satan to remove him.

Another object peculiar to Porto Rico is the "mammiform stone," suggestive by its shape of a human form buried beneath a

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mountain. The mountain is of the convex, rounded shape so peculiar to the hills of the island, and the man beneath it was doubtless intended for a Carib, the inveterate enemy of the Boriqueño. The suggestion from which the aboriginal artist worked was without doubt obtained first from the pyramidal and rounded hills, so numerous and so beautiful; and second from the ferocious Carib, who came every year on ravage intent. By nothing less than planting a mountain upon his back, the native sculptor probably reasoned, could the pernicious cannibal be securely held!

That the Boriqueños were not wholly devoted to the arts of peace—to agriculture, fishing, weaving hammocks, carving beads and ornaments—is shown by the objects for use in war which have been passed down to us. There are large collections of them in the museums, consisting of banner-stones, war-club heads, axes, and hatchets of stone, and likewise spears, arrow-heads, and darts. Caciques like Agueybana had armories of aboriginal weapons extensively equipped; but they were usually subterranean, for great heaps of stone battle-axes, war-clubs, arrows, etc., have been found buried in the ground, or concealed in caverns.

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The language of these people was rich and varied, and differed but slightly from that of their neighbors in the islands north and south of them, all of whom, except the Caribs, were of what is known as the Arawak stock. Let us take three Arawak words, for example, which have in the course of time become ingrafted upon our own language: hammock, canoe, and iguana. All the islanders—in Boriquen, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Cuba—pronounced them the same, or similarly. In forming the plural of substantives they added *ati*, *uti*, or *anu*. In their adjectives they recognized two genders, the masculine and the neuter, in which latter the feminine was incorporated, but without distinction; for to the Indian, woman is not a person, but a thing, says the philologist.

The family names of individuals were derived from animals, plants, rocks, etc., the qualities of which, especially if making for greatness or valor, were supposed to enter into the persons bearing the respective appellations. Next to the cacique, the buhiti, or medicine-man, was the most powerful personage of the tribe; but, though the office was considered a very desirable one, it had its pains and penalties. For

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example, if a cacique died while under treatment by a buhiti, the latter was in danger of having his eyes torn out by the enraged relatives of the recently deceased. Sometimes he was killed and sent to join his chief in his lonely journey to the unknown world; sometimes he was let off with a mild reprimand, especially if the person who had passed away was unpopular. The treatment prescribed by the medicine-man consisted in making a great deal of noise, in order to frighten away any evil spirit that might be lurking about, in punctures of the painful parts, and sometimes the administering of baths, either cold or warm, especially if the patient were suffering from a fever.

The flora of the island abounds in plants possessing curative and medicinal properties, such as numerous species of *Malvaceæ*, which are emollient or mucilaginous; the bulbs of lilies and roots of the *Asclepia*, which are emetic; the leaves of *Cæsalpina* and the grains of *Euphorbia* are purgative, while others are astringent in quality; the roots of palms are diuretic; and there are numerous fruits, the juices of which are acid, and refreshing to the sick. Notwith-

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standing their empiricism, it is believed that most of the medicine-men possessed a knowledge of the virtues which the various plants contained; and that they were sometimes successful in their surgery (having joined fractured limbs and healed terrible wounds) has been proved by the mute testimony of bones exhumed from ancient graves.

The buhiti were also diviners, necromancers, "sacerdotes" or priests, attending to the spiritual as well as the physical needs of their people; and though they knew no more than their followers respecting the God that dwelled in the heavens, they professed to know, which served their purpose just as well. They practised upon the fears and the superstition of the natives; they told them of the devil who would get them if they misbehaved, and of the great *Cemi* into whose presence they would enter at last, if their lives accorded with the precepts they, the sagacious buhiti, laid down for them. They memorized and passed on to others the areytos, or legendary ballads by which the scant history of the people was preserved; they prescribed the shape in which the clay idols were to be cast, or carved from stone; and it is a wonder,

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indeed, that such a general resemblance existed among the idols of all the islands, as well as all implements of war and for domestic use, throughout the West Indies. Primitive man, it has been said, always works along the same general line of development, and thus it is we find the "celts" from the "kitchen middins" of Norway or Denmark resembling those from Central, South, and North America.

But enough has been cited to show that the Boriqueños were in the most primitive stage of culture, and that they were superior in their morals to their art. They had advanced much further than Juan Ponce de Leon and his brother-Spaniards along the road that leads to paradise—according to the Book of Books, for they regarded the rights of their fellow-men in the same light as their own. They did to others, so far as their limited perception gave them understanding, as they hoped and expected others to do to them. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was certainly their maxim in war; but in peace they practised the precepts of brotherly love.

Finally, to show that the island was extensively populated, we will mention the

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different tribes and the names of their chiefs or inferior caciques. Their general government was autocratic, but at the same time patriarchal. When Juan Ponce arrived at Boriquen the supreme ruler was Guaybana, who received him so hospitably; and after his death, Agueybana, whom he killed, or caused to be killed, in the last great battle between the Indians and the Spaniards. After that there was no longer any supreme chief or head, and no general government, each tribe acting independently, until reduced and disintegrated by the Spaniards. Not all the inferior, or sub-caciques, are known, but most of their names are preserved in those of rivers, mountains, provinces, and towns, such as Utuado, Bayamon, Yabucoa, Maunabo, Gurabo, Cayey, and Camuey—all Indian appellations pertaining to obscure chiefs whose places of residence were not exactly known. Those whose names have descended to us in connection with the provinces they governed are, in addition to the supreme caciques already mentioned, first of all, Areziba, whose district corresponded to that of the present Arecibo, in the north-central part of the island. Mabodamaca, one of the most valiant

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and vigorous of the small caciques—who was finally surprised and overcome by Captain Salazar Guarionex (a name also borne by a former cacique in Hispaniola)—possessed a prestige superior to that of the ordinary chieftain, and governed a territory adjoining that of his king. His neighbor on the north was Urayoan, who lived on the river Añasco; Mayagoex lived in the present district of Mayagüez; Brayoan (who drowned the first Spaniard in Boriquen, and proved him to be mortal) held the headwaters of the Añasco in his keeping, and, in common with Aymamon, paid tribute to Guarionex. All these were on or near the north and west coast of the island; the south at that time was almost unknown, but on the east resided Humacao, or Macao, after whom the province he held received the name it bears to-day.

Within a few months after the battle in which the king lost his life and the Boriqueños their liberties, the whole island was brought under subjection, for reinforcements swarmed over from Hispaniola, and by orders of Governor Ponce the coast was circumnavigated and the interior overrun. The settlement of Caparra proving too difficult of access from the coast, and having

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no peculiar advantages to offset its cragged situation, was eventually abandoned. Before it was, however, the island had been well surveyed, as well as subjugated, and settlements begun at various points. The west end of the island was first to feel the conqueror's yoke, the natives of the provinces retreating gradually eastward, along the central range of mountains, and seeking a last refuge on the slopes and around the summit of the giant Luquillo. The wild mountaineers were difficult to conquer, and for a long time held out against the Spanish invaders; but in the end weapons and armor of steel prevailed against stone arrows and war-clubs. Fleet as the Indians were, they could not outrun the swift-footed blood-hounds, nor escape their fangs, once they were put on the scent.

It has been denied that the Spaniards used blood-hounds in their conquest of Boriquen, but there is incontestible evidence to the contrary, for Governor Ponce himself took with him to the island his famous hound, with which he had hunted the Indians of Hispaniola so successfully that he received the pay, the rations, and share of booty allowed to a cross-bowman. His name was

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Becerrico, and he was so renowned for his courage, speed, sagacity, and prowess in general that all the *conquistadores* knew of him, and envied Juan Ponce the possession of such a wonderful beast. When Vasco Nuñez de Balboa went to Darien from Hispaniola, the very year in which Juan Ponce invaded Boriquen, he took with him (at the risk of losing his freedom for doing so) a son of Becerrico named Leoncico, or the "Little Lion," whose exploits gained for him a reputation second only to his father's. These precious beasts seemed to have a special sense for distinguishing friend from foe, as both of them could discriminate the Indians who were allies from those at war with the Spaniards, whether encountered by night or by day.

Respecting Becerrico's sagacity, Oviedo relates a story which appears incredible. It seems that on the night of his fight with the cacique Mabodamaca, Diego de Salazar had, for some reason, decided to throw a certain old Indian woman to the dogs. He did not care to have her destroyed in sight of the soldiers, and, to afford a pretext for sending her away, gave her a letter for Governor Ponce, who was expected next morning.

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The poor old woman, overjoyed at the prospect of gaining her liberty, perhaps, as a reward of her journey, hastened into the forest. After she had gone a short distance, the hound was loosed and set off on her trail, soon arriving in sight of his prospective prey. His fierce growls aroused her fears; but the desperate nature of the situation emboldened her to make an appeal to the brute as he dashed towards her. Squatting down in the road, she held the letter towards Becerrico, and in her own language said: "*Perro, Señor Perro*" (Oh, dog, good Sir Dog). "I am going to take a letter to the governor. See, here it is. It is sent by your captain to your master. Now, good Sir Dog, do not do me any harm, for I am going to the governor!"

At sight of the letter the dog halted, came and sniffed it, then leaped over the old woman's head and returned to camp, his instinct having told him that the poor creature was not an enemy to be destroyed, but a friend. When Captain Salazar saw the hound return in such short order he knew he had not accomplished his bloody mission, so had him tied up and messengers sent for the woman. She came in fear and

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trembling, having divined the trick that had been played upon her; but Salazar said: "Fear not, my good woman, I am going to give you your liberty, for whom Becerrico spares is no enemy to us, but a friend, and Christians can do no better than follow his noble example!"

XII

THE GOVERNOR BUILDS A CASTLE

1511

THE governor was not constantly in the field during the conquest of Boriquen, but only occasionally, when his presence was necessary to inspire the troops, to decide the boundaries of a newly projected town, or to assign a drove of captive Indians to some favorite lieutenant. He was long in establishing himself at any place that should become a permanent settlement, because of the difficulties involved in changing his base of operations and the questions to be settled, not only in his own time, but relating to future generations. He must consider not alone the demands of the present but the contingencies of the future. In the first place, he should keep in touch with the mother-colony in Hispaniola, whence he drew supplies for his army, and also reinforcements of soldiers and settlers. In the

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second, he should consider the possible relation of the port at which he made his permanent seat to Spain, the mother-country; for, when sufficiently settled and the produce of the island came to be considerable enough for export, connection with Europe must be established and maintained by means of ships.

It was, therefore, on account of the many vexatious problems to solve that Juan Ponce delayed the planting of himself, his family, and the headquarters of the army at some point where they could remain undisturbed. In pursuance of his desire to acquaint himself thoroughly with the resources of the island, as well as its various ports and advantageous points for settlement, he made many excursions by sea and by land. In one of these he visited and examined anew the place where he had made the acquaintance of Guaybana and his family. He noted then, what he had previously overlooked or since forgotten, the great natural beauty of Aguada and Aguedilla; the vast and beautiful curve of the coast, with surf-washed beaches strewn with shells, at that time overtopped by tropical trees and pierced by the channels of down-rushing streams.

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Scant three years had elapsed since his first visit to the island, barely two since he had returned with soldiers for its conquest; and now, how changed! Then the beaches had swarmed with Indians, who had wonderingly approached him, timidly touched him to assure themselves that he was mortal, and then led the way to their village and spread forth the most bountiful hospitality. Now there came no one out to greet him; the shore was silent but for the cries of the sea-birds, and the village was deserted. The great bohio in which the cacique had entertained him was filled with the rank growth of the tropical forest, such as advances like a skirmish-line ahead of the main body of arboreal giants, takes silent possession, and in a few months works a transformation. The roof of palm-thatch had fallen in, many of the supports had broken down, and the great dais which had served the cacique as a throne lay flat upon the ground.

In the days to which Juan Ponce could not but have looked back with regret he was served by smiling damsels, who brought him fruits and refreshing drinks as he lay in a hammock beneath the forest-canopy conversing with the king. These nut-brown

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virgins wore but nature's garb, save for a sea-shell amulet hung about the neck, and around the waist a short skirt of sweet-scented grasses; yet were they as innocent as babes and modest as children. Laughing, dancing, singing, with prattle sounding like the running waters of a brook, eager to please and desirous to serve, these maidens recalled to the soldier, by their joyous presence, the stories he had heard the Moors repeat, relating to the houris of the Mohammedan paradise.

As the stern soldier gazed at them through half-closed eyes, noting their innocence and joyousness, his heart grew warm within him yearningly, as once it had when his first-born was brought him, and the world seemed full of love, of peace, and of happiness. To himself, then, he had resolved that no harm should come to these maidens, even though he was meditating the invasion of their country and the enslavement of their tribe. He would remember, he would instruct his soldiers regarding them, and after the conquest was effected, Doña Inez should found a school for their instruction, a retreat for their protection.

But now behold Juan Ponce de Leon again

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in that same place, clad in armor of steel, and pointing out to his comrades the scenes of his former visit. With his sword he indicates the spot where the feast was spread, the trees between which the hammocks were swung, the glade adown which tripped the happy maidens when they came to serve him and the king.

But all was silent now. The wind rustled gently the long leaves of the palm, played with the emerald fingers of the tall tree-ferns, sent a sigh through the king's deserted palace; but there was no other sound save for the hollow moaning of a wood-dove. Juan Ponce shook his head sadly and was about to go, when his companion, Captain Salazar, exclaimed: "Hark thee, Señor Governor. It seemed I heard a groan."

"'Twas more belike the dove," answered De Leon. "Aloft in the tree-top it calleth to its mate. Come, it is near dusk, and the marquee is pitched on the sands awaiting our return."

From the site of Guaybana's deserted court a broad road stretched to the shore—a smooth, straight highway, lined with trees—and though it was then encumbered with fallen limbs and branches, it was still pass-

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able. On either side were the weed-grown gardens, formerly cultivated by the Indians in maize and yucca, upon which, with the wild fruits from the forest, they mainly subsisted. The soldiers turned to leave the wood, by a trail which led into the highway. Again the sound saluted their ears, which Salazar declared to be a groan, and not the moaning of the dove, for it proceeded from near earth and had a human accent. He drew his sword and started for the point whence it came, followed slowly by Juan Ponce de Leon.

"Have a care, my Diego," cautioned the governor. "It may be the savages are all dead or driven away, but still there is danger of an ambushade."

Salazar proceeded with caution, being also an old soldier, and with his sword parted some branches that hung over a hollow beneath a leaning tree. Peering within, he saw stretched out on the ground the emaciated figure of a girl, or woman, to all appearances near death. She stared at the intruders with lack-lustre eyes, too weak to move or even to speak. Her hair, raven black and abundant, lay in a tangled mass about her head. One arm lay across her

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breast, and from the other, stretched at her side, the hand had been cut off, not long before, since the wound had hardly healed.

Juan Ponce muttered an oath. "That's the work of the scoundrels from Xaragua, Roldan's men," he exclaimed. "Have I not told them often not to bring hither their murderous practices, mangling and mutilating? Would I were strong enough to send them back again, one and all, to Hispaniola!"

"Ha, what's this? A cross of gold on the string around her neck. Salazar! Diego Salazar! *I gave this girl that cruzito!*"

Juan Ponce fell back as though struck in the face, and a groan burst from his lips. "Poor little one," he said, with a sigh. "She was one of the damsels I met here that first time I came to see the king. Her mother was the cacique's mother, so she was a princess; and she gave her to me peradventure I might marry; but I could not, of course, having a wife in Hispaniola. So, as a token of appreciation, I gave her that cross which thou now seest, Diego Salazar. And she was the king's sister; sweet and winsome was she; but now, behold! The king is dead; her mother, I have heard, perished in the flames; and she—"

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"She, too, is dead, I fear me," exclaimed Diego Salazar. "Yes, her eyes are wide-staring, and the lids move not, neither doth she breathe. We have come only to see her die, my governor."

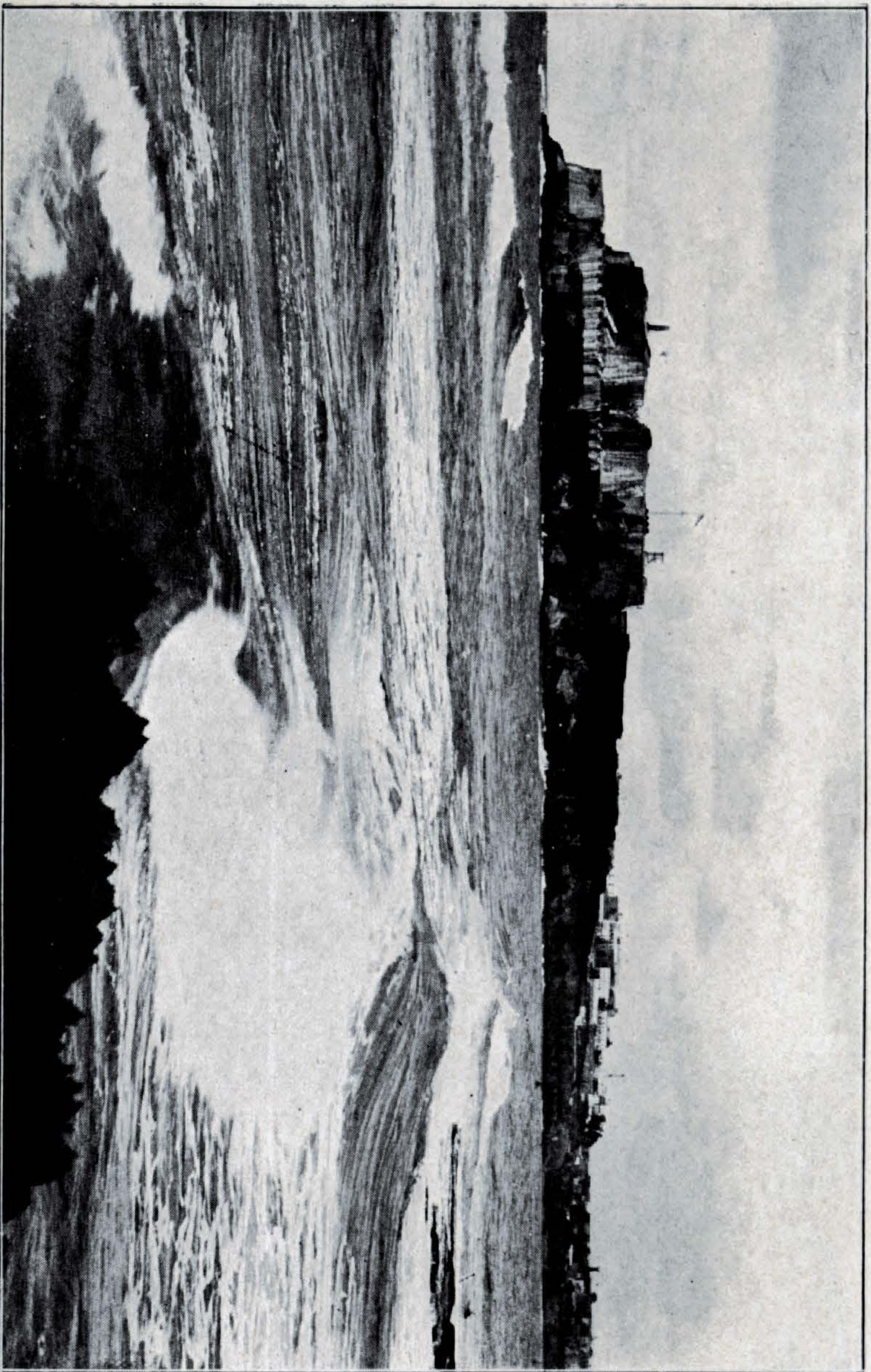
"May the saints forgive me," murmured De Leon. "I cannot but think it was my doings that brought her to this sad ending. Her brother befriended me; her mother would have bestowed her most precious jewel upon me; and see, Diego Salazar, how I have requited their friendship!"

Captain Salazar said no word, either of reproof or consolation, knowing the truth of this self-accusation, but believing the governor's mood but a passing one, scarcely worthy, he thought, blood-stained as he was, a stern soldier like Juan Ponce de Leon. Together, in silence, they dug a shallow grave with their swords and placed the frail body therein. They covered it with forest mould, and scattered leaves over the grave; but before the princess was hidden forever from sight, it is said, Juan Ponce removed the cross from her neck and took it away—though never to be seen, while he lived, by any of his comrades or kindred. Thenceforth it reposed beneath his gorget, and

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there it was found (according to the local legend, of which this story is but an elaboration) — there it was found when, ten years later, having met a violent death, his armor was removed preparatory to sepulture.

Whether this tale be true or whether it be false, and put forth merely to account for the exceeding great change that came over Juan Ponce at this time, who can tell? This is true, however: that thenceforth he was, indeed, changed for the better. His holy talisman, and the sad scenes of which it reminded him, may have wrought that difference in his character which is noticeable between the Juan Ponce who ravaged Higuey and Boriquen, in the early days of his career, and the serious yet romantic cavalier who sought the Fountain of Youth, bent upon perpetuating human life instead of destroying it. He returned to Caparra contemplative and sad, resolved upon leaving at once a place fraught with so many disagreeable memories. In his wanderings he had examined all the ports of the island, and had come to the conclusion that there was none like that in the northeast part of Boriquen, now known as San Juan de Puerto Rico. Its entrance was narrow, yet



MORRO CASTLE, SAN JUAN, PORTO RICO

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the harbor within was spacious and landlocked, while between it and the open ocean was a rocky peninsula which presented a site unsurpassed for a castle and fortifications.

While Caparra was not completely abandoned until 1522, the army was withdrawn from it in the latter part of 1511 or early months of 1512, and a settlement begun on the more advantageous site at San Juan. Here stands to-day the city of San Juan (named after the gallant conquistador who founded it), occupying the western end of a small island on the north coast, two miles in length and half a mile in breadth. Bridges and causeways connect it with the mainland now, but in Juan Ponce's time it was entirely isolated, and a better place for defence against the attacks of the Indians could not anywhere be found. Its strategic and defensive features were so manifest that it was early seized upon by the successors of Governor Ponce, and in 1584 the famous Morro Castle was completed, which commands the harbor entrance and the sea beyond.

This ancient citadel was the beginning of a line of impregnable fortifications which entirely surround the city, enclosing within

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it a series of connected bastions, with moats, guarded gates, *fortalezas*, or little forts, lofty battlements, semi-bastions, and quaint sentry turrets projecting over the sea. San Juan is like a walled town of the Middle Ages, and its fortifications, though practically begun by Ponce de Leon in 1512, were two hundred and fifty years in process of construction. They were planned, as we find them now, in 1630, and nearly completed in 1641, yet the castle of San Cristobal, which commands the land approaches to San Juan, was not finished until 1771.

The city within the walls is one of the oldest, as it is the quaintest, to be found within the limits of the United States, antedating St. Augustine, in Florida, by more than fifty years, and, as a contemporary of Baracoa and Santiago de Cuba, is more ancient than Havana. In fact, the hero of this biography was engaged in laying the foundations of San Juan when Velasquez set out for the island of Cuba, under the direction of Don Diego Columbus. While he was effecting its conquest, Juan Ponce de Leon was bringing the Boriqueños under subjection, Balboa was pursuing his discoveries in



CASA BLANCA, HOUSE OF PONCE DE LEON

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Darien, and Pizarro was preparing for his mighty achievements in Peru.

Whether the first structure erected by Ponce de Leon is still standing or not, the oldest building in San Juan is the castle he built, near the point overlooking the harbor, and known to-day as the *Casa Blanca*, or the White House. Taking it in its entirety, also, it is the most picturesque, and historic as well, for it was not only built but was occupied by him after he left Caparra and while he continued governor of Boriquen.

If you would find Caparra, you must cross the bay of San Juan to a little hamlet called Cataño, and take a road into the country, which is fertile, but not so picturesque as that immediately about the city built on the peninsula. But little is left of the town whence Ponce de Leon directed his warlike operations against the Indians, for soon after the seat of government was removed to San Juan it was invaded by an army of ants, which were not so easily withstood as the desultory attacks of the natives. Then an epidemic of small-pox broke out, followed by diseases due to the excesses of the settlers, who fled from the place in dismay. Caparra is still known as *Pueblo Viejo*, or the Ancient

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Town, but nothing now remains of it except a line of crumbling walls and the ruins of its aqueduct.

What the Spaniards erected in Porto Rico, as elsewhere, they intended should outlast their time—speaking of the structures that succeeded to the frail bohios of reeds and palm-leaves, patterned after those of the natives. Building-material was abundant, skilled workmen were numerous in the army, and thus we find these solid structures of stone, like the Casa Blanca and the Morro, as perfect in condition as at the time they were erected. So this relic of Ponce de Leon remains for us to view to-day, intact and picturesque. From its roof, or *azotea*, and from its seaward-facing windows, the views of land-locked bay, surf-beaten shores, and watery horizon are entrancing, especially at sunset.

The castle is surrounded by a garden, filled with cocoa-palms and such like tropical trees, and the garden by an ancient wall with crenellated parapet, beyond which is the outer line of defence, with massive buttressed battlements and quaint sentry turrets hanging precariously over the indigo-tinted waters of the bay. The outlook landward is not

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less attractive, taking in the vast sweep of palm-fringed coast and the ranks of rounded hills, cultivated to their very summits, which recede into the distance, until merged in the majestic Yunque, central peak of the great Luquillo range, four thousand feet in height. Cloud wreaths encircle Yunque's verdant crown, spirals of smoke ascend from numberless valleys, as in the days when every vale had clusters of bohios sheltering a happy, innocent people for whom the advent of Juan Ponce de Leon meant extermination.

XIII

THE FOUNT OF PERENNIAL YOUTH

1512

WHILE Juan Ponce de Leon was building his castle—imagining, perhaps, that here he would rule and rest during the remainder of his days—something occurred which seriously interfered with his plans. In a word, his erstwhile comrades and one-time superiors, Juan Ceron and Miguel Diaz, came back to Boriquen, with power to supersede him as governor and commander of the forces. They came direct from Spain, by command of the king, who finally acknowledged that he had infringed the rights of Don Diego Columbus in appointing Ponce de Leon as governor, and took this method of making restitution.

Juan Ponce had been hasty, ill-advised in sending Ceron and Diaz home as prisoners to Spain, for their arrival there had excited the sympathy of the court and provoked in-

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quiry into the respective rights of the claimants. The governor was found to be wholly in the wrong, but, inasmuch as he had by that time accomplished the subjugation of the island, and sent to the home country a large amount of gold and other spoil, the king was well satisfied with what he had done, and cautioned his envoys not to disturb him in the possession of whatever property he might have accumulated, whether in Indians, lands, or gold. To mollify the choleric old soldier, they carried him a letter, written by the royal hand, in which the king assured him that he had done this merely as an act of justice towards Diaz and Ceron, without reflecting in any manner upon his conduct as military commander or governor.

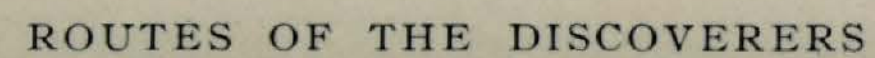
Juan Ponce surrendered the government with what grace he could, giving into the hands of Diaz and Ceron all the properties pertaining to the crown, but reserving for himself such as he chose to consider his own. He then had vast landed estates, bands of Indians in repartimiento, a large accumulation of gold gleaned from the streams of Boriquen, and his castle, so he should have been content. Whether content or not (and

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in passing we may remark that it was not in his nature to be so), he was willing to be relieved of the cares of government for a while. He had, in fact, an idea that there still remained new worlds to be discovered, new islands—perchance continents—to conquer, and, like the restless soldier that he was, yearned to go away on ventures new.

Let us review, in a single paragraph, what had been accomplished by Spain at that time, in the way of discovery, since the sailing of Columbus from Palos in August, 1492. He himself had brought to light the islands of the West Indies and the eastern coast of Central America; Vespucci, Pinzon, and Solis had extended the line of discovery southward along the east coast of South America; Ojeda, Cosa, Bastidas, Nicuesa, and others had connected the discoveries of Columbus on his third voyage with those of his fourth, and completed the survey of the continental coast line from Yucatan to the Orinoco; but as yet no great extent of interior had been penetrated, except in Darien.

Strangest of all, the great peninsula now called Florida was still unknown, unless, indeed, it had been coasted by the Cabots, coming down from Labrador in 1497 or



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1498. If Columbus had not changed his course when on his first voyage, he would have landed on its coast instead of in the Bahamas. Ocampo, when in 1508 he circumnavigated Cuba, seems not to have heard of the peninsula, within less than a hundred miles of which he must have sailed. Three years later, Velasquez subjugates the island, sailing partly around it, and marching across it at various points; but does not learn of Florida. The natives must have known of it, however, as the Indians of Cuba sometimes made voyages longer than the distance across the Florida channel between the north coast and the keys.

The Caribs from the Lesser Antilles, lying between Boriquen and Trinidad, off the Orinoco, performed longer voyages in their war-canoes, and in some of their excursions are said to have traversed the entire length of the Bahama archipelago, returning with strange tales of the islands and people they had seen. As some of them had halted at Boriquen on their return, and some had settled there, these tales had become traditional with the natives, who repeated them to the Spaniards. Thus it had come about that Ponce de Leon heard of them, and one

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day there was brought to him a Carib woman from the hills of Luquillo, who related the story of a war-canoe that left for a voyage to the northern islands and never returned. The Caribs who sailed it were kinsmen of hers, who, having heard of an island containing a wonderful fountain, the waters of which had the power of restoring youth to aged people, went off in search of it. As they never came back, she reasoned, they must have found the fountain of rejuvenescence, for they were valorous braves and skilful sailors, who could not have been detained against their will by man or tempest.

The governor questioned the woman closely, and found her firm in the belief that there was a wonderful island filled with rare delights, wherein was a spring that gushed forth in an unfailing stream, to bathe in which was to receive the gift of perennial youth. It was called, she said, Bimini, and was far north in the chain of islands now known as the Bahamas. She thought she could guide the governor to it, because she had often heard her kinsmen discuss the island and the way thither. It was as vividly pictured in her brain as her own bohio and the path that led to it from the highway.

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As for going thither, she answered, when questioned by the governor, now that she was old it mattered not where she dwelled, whether on land or on ocean, and she was at the master's service. For the fountain she cared not, since her life had been a hard one, her troubles many, and she was oppressed by the manifold burdens of existence.

She was called a Carib, though born in Boriquen, having been captured in her youth by the cannibals and taken to their island of Turuqueira, or Guadelupe, where she was espoused by a warrior of the tribe. Her tales of the beauty and fertility of Boriquen appealed to the warrior, and he took advantage of the first expedition northward to remove thither. Children were born to them, but they were lost to her now, having been enslaved; her husband had long before tired of her and the island, and gone back to the cannibal isles; thus, having nobody to live for, or to take care of her in old age, she may well have said that one place was as good as another. By this she meant there were no tender ties that bound her to Boriquen, all her family having disappeared, being absent if not dead, and her home a

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mere hut of reeds that the first hurricane might utterly destroy.

By the governor's command, the *vieja*, as she was called — being a woman past the prime of life, though not "old," as this name would imply — was taken to the servants' quarters in the castle and provided with food. She was detained there, though not against her will, until the governor should decide upon the course to pursue in respect to an exploration northward. Rumors of the existence of Bimini and the spring of perennial youth had reached his ears before, but being vague they had not impressed him like this story of the Carib, for she could guide him thither. War-worn veteran that he was, with wealth at his command sufficient for many years to come, he desired now a prolonged rest from his labors; and if he *could* renew in his exhausted frame the vigor of youth, how much it would mean to him! Doubtless, however, Ponce de Leon proceeded under the impulse of a number of motives, and not solely for the purpose of discovering the Fountain of Youth, when at last he concluded to make a voyage through the Bahama chain and see what there was beyond it.

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There was, he believed, still a "third world" to discover, and mayhap he might be the fortunate man. Since the time that Don Christopher Columbus had sailed through the archipelago about midway its length, in 1492, no explorations had been made there. The man-hunters of Hispaniola had made hasty visits to get slaves for the mines, and had nearly depopulated several islands; but they had touched only at the southernmost. He, then, being now at liberty to do as he liked, and with unbounded wealth at command, would equip an expedition for seeking out what lay beyond the misty barrier.

This was the conclusion Ponce de Leon came to, after thinking the matter over, and repeatedly interrogating the *vieja*, whose stories were ever the same. There was an island in the northwest Bahamas, she said, abounding in everything that man most desired, including gold and delicious fruits; and in the centre of the island was a spring of purest water, to bathe in which would make one young and handsome again. This story she reiterated, until at last Governor Ponce became convinced of her faith in it, if not of its truth.

There were then three caravels in port,

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which had come from Spain with supplies for the army. They were at his disposal, if not owned by him, so he gave orders for fitting them out for a voyage. When it became noised about that the veteran Juan Ponce was to set forth on a voyage of discovery, he had no lack of applicants for the cruise. His own retainers were sufficiently numerous to fill three vessels the size of those caravels, and it seemed that every Spaniard in Boriquen desired to accompany him. They were not all old men, either, who wished to make the voyage for the purpose merely of renewing their youth; but most of them were young and able, who had no thought of aught but the gold to be found, and the adventures that were always the share of him who went with Juan Ponce on an expedition for ravage or conquest. Ceron and Garcia objected to the withdrawal from the island of so many stalwart soldiers, protesting that there was still need of them, as the Indians were not entirely pacified, and the Caribs yet made desultory excursions from their strongholds in the south.

Juan Ponce laughed at their fears, and did not fail to point out that the island was

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already pacified when they returned to govern it; also, that the soldiers' terms of enlistment had expired (most of them), and there was no power, save the king's orders, to prevent them from going where they wished. And he flung a Spanish proverb at them: "*Por donde va la mar, vayan las arenas*" — that is to say: "Where the sea goes, there the sands go." And they could not stop them, either.

Juan Ceron grumbled and Diego Garcia blustered; but what cared the governor? He cared no whit, in truth, for they could not detain the men, and neither had they control over his own actions. So there was great bustle at the castle San Juan. Troops of Indians came in from the country with provisions; there was a slaughtering of cattle and hogs, the meat of which was salted for the voyage. Cannon were mounted on the decks of the caravels, ammunition stored in their holds, and when all was ready Juan Ponce bade adieu to his family and set sail for the port of San German, on the southwest coast of the island, where the bulk of the provisions was to be taken aboard, such as maize and cassava bread, for which that part of the country was famous.

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At this time there resided with Ponce de Leon, in his castle, his wife, two daughters, and a young son, who were, of course, left behind when this venturesome voyage was undertaken. Little is said of them, however dear they may have been to the husband and father; but that they survived him is known, and presumably they resided in the Casa Blanca during the remainder of their lives. Unlike the wife of De Soto, however, who was left in Havana while her lord made his unfortunate venture in Florida, Doña Inez did not participate in her husband's public affairs. She remained in Casa Blanca, watching and waiting for the soldier's return. Twice thereafter Ponce de Leon left her thus while he went on his venturesome expeditions—in 1515 against the Caribs, and in 1521 to Florida, which last ended in his death.

After the caravels were provisioned at San German, Ponce de Leon took a course thence northeasterly, crossing the Mona Passage and coasting Hispaniola as far as Puerta Plata, or the Port of the Silver Mountain, whence he continued on into the archipelago of the Bahamas. In brief, he traversed the entire archipelago from south-

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east to northwest, and threaded his way among a chain of islands six hundred miles in length. Even now, with all the aids of buoys by day and lights by night, at various points, the Bahama channels are exceedingly difficult, and sometimes perilous, to navigate; but what must they have been in the time of Ponce de Leon? The bones of many a galleon lie bleaching on the reefs concealed beneath the waters there—remains of vessels wrecked centuries ago, and the time is not far distant in the past when the wreckers of the Bahamas made fortunes from the misfortunes of seafarers.

“There is no part of the seas, I believe,” says Bryan Edwards, who wrote a history of the West Indies, “in which the navigation is more difficult and deceitful than near the shore of Florida, where the currents, setting from the westward through the channels of the Bahamas, mingle with that impetuous tide [the Gulf Stream] which issues from the Gulf of Mexico. . . . That forty sail of wrecking-vessels should have kept their station at one inlet on this coast is a pretty convincing proof of the numerous victims continually thrown on its shoals. The well-known American traveller, Charle-

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voix, many years ago was wrecked in this quarter, and he gives a pretty exact picture of what almost daily occurs.

“So very fallacious and irresistible are the cross-currents and eddies that it often happens while vessels are steering in one course, they are carried nearly in an opposite direction, and till the crews behold the breakers, or the wrecking-vessels hovering round them, they can hardly persuade themselves of their desperate situation.”

Though fortuitously, perhaps, Ponce de Leon had set forth on his voyage at the very best season of the year in that latitude. He left the port of San German on March 3, 1513, and on the 14th, after devious voyaging, he arrived at the island of Guanani, or Guanahani, the veritable “San Salvador,” and first landfall of Columbus in America. This island is situated somewhere midway the archipelago of the Bahamas; but whether it is that now known as Cat, Watling’s, or Eleuthera is still a moot question. One of these, undoubtedly, was that on which Columbus first landed, in October, 1492, and hither came Ponce de Leon twenty years later, on his way to islands still farther to the north.

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He had been "favored with propitious weather and tranquil seas, and had glided smoothly with wind and current along that verdant archipelago, visiting one island after another, until, on the 14th of the month, he arrived at Guanahani, or San Salvador, where Christopher Columbus had first put his foot on the shores of the New World. His inquiries for the island of Bimini were all in vain, and as to the Fountain of Youth, he may have drunk of every fountain and river and lake of the archipelago, even to the salt pools of Turk's Island, without being a whit the younger."

How different, when Juan Ponce de Leon visited Guanahani in 1513, was that island from the San Salvador which Columbus had discovered in 1492, and named "in honor of our Lord and Saviour!" It had not changed in its physical aspects, but in respect to its population. As already mentioned, the only Spaniards who had visited the island between the advent of Columbus and the arrival of Juan Ponce were the debased slave-hunters from Hispaniola; but they had almost entirely depopulated it. When Columbus approached the coast in his vessels, the strand was swarming with men, women,

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and children, and the island supported a numerous population; but when Juan Ponce found harbor there, in order to make some repairs to his caravels, scarce any Indians were to be seen. Nearly all had either been killed, or made captive and carried away to the mines in distant Hispaniola. The few poor wretches remaining in Guanahani were then hiding in caves, where they cowered in terror, afraid to go forth in search of food, though famishing. Their remains have been found in these caves, hundreds of years after Columbus and Ponce de Leon passed to their reward, and the writer of these lines has seen, in *situ*, some of the implements they left, as stone axes, hatchets, war-clubs, arrow-heads, and hoes.

Confirmatory of what we have said respecting these people and the present aspect of their former abode, the historian already quoted, Bryan Edwards, has the following: "There was not the least appearance of any cultivation on the island; but I could not behold the beautiful and fragrant woods over the white strand without recurring to the fate of that innocent race of people, whose name it bears, but who have long since been dragged from their native shores

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by the merciless ambition and avarice of their European visitors.

“A passage in Herrera came forcibly to my recollection while meditating on the subject, in which he says that on the first arrival of the Spaniards this unsuspecting but devoted people were never satisfied with looking at them merely; they knelt down, lifted up their hands, and gave thanks to God, inviting one another to admire the ‘*heavenly men*.’ Twenty years, however, had scarcely elapsed before these ‘heavenly men’ found it convenient to transport them, by force or artifice, to dig in the mines of Hispaniola, a measure to which the court of Spain was tempted to give its assent by the plausible suggestion that it would be the most effectual mode of civilizing and instructing them in the Christian religion. Upon this pretence forty thousand souls (probably the whole population of the island) were transported to Hispaniola. So exalted was the opinion which this simple people entertained of their destroyers, and so strong and universal is the persuasion of the human mind that a destiny awaits it beyond the miseries and disappointments of its present bounded existence, that many

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of the Lucayans were induced with cheerfulness to abandon their homes, under a persuasion that they should meet in a happier country the spirits of their deceased friends, with whom the Spaniards represented themselves as living in a state of society.

“As the situation of these islands with respect to each other invited a continual intercourse among the inhabitants, who probably subsisted in a great measure on fish, one may justly presume that they were principally devoted to a maritime life. Some of their canoes were large enough to carry between forty and fifty persons. Indeed, many convincing proofs of their intrepidity and expertness on the water occurred after their transportation to Santo Domingo, when, finding out the delusion which had been practised to decoy them from their native country, they made every effort to regain it. Some few effected their escape, although many were frustrated in the design. Two men and a woman constructed a raft, and having laid in a stock of maize, and water in gourds, in the hollow of a tree attached to the bottom of the raft, they put to sea, and had actually proceeded one hundred and fifty miles on their long and perilous voy-

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age, when, intercepted by a Spanish ship, it was their cruel fortune to be taken and carried back to the country which they so much detested, and where they were doomed to eternal slavery."

XIV

FLORIDA AND BIMINI

1513

BEFORE proceeding farther with Juan Ponce on his voyage to Bimini and Florida, let us pause to discuss a question which has vexed the historians not a little. It relates to the date of his sailing, and consequently the date of the resultant discovery—namely, of Florida.

In Peter Martyr's *Decades*, as translated into English by Richard Eden, is the following reference to the "Discouerynge of the Lande of Floryda": . . . "The Gouverneur of the Ilande of Boriquena, Iohn Ponce de Leon, being discharged of hys office and very ryche, furnyshed and sent foorth two carauels to seek the Ilande of Boynca, in the which the Indians affirmed to be a Fontayne or Springe whose water is of vertue to make olde men younge. But, whyle he trauayled syxe moneths with outragious desire amonge

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many ilandes to fynde what he soughte and coulde fynde no token of any such fontayne, he entered into Bimini and discouered the lande of Floryda, in the yeere 1512, on Easter Day."

In his second *Decade*, Peter Martyr writes, addressing the bishop of Rome: "Among the islands on the north side of Hispaniola there is one about 325 leagues distant, as they say which have searched the same, in the which is a continual spring of running water, of such marvellous virtue that the water thereof being drunk (perhaps with some diet) maketh olde men young again. And here I must make protestation to your holiness not to think this to be said lightly or rashly, for they have so spread this rumor for a truth throughout all the court, that not only all the people, but many of them whom wisdom or fortune hath divided from the common sort, think it to be true."

"So fully persuaded was the worthy old cavalier, Juan Ponce, of the existence of this region, that he fitted out three ships at his own expense," says Washington Irving, in his *Spanish Voyages of Discovery*, . . . "and sailed with them on the 3d of March, 1512."

This date was adopted by Irving and Ban-

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croft, two eminent authorities, as well as by Herrera, and other writers of repute in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; but original documents, discovered since they wrote, make it certain that the year of sailing, and hence of the discovery, was 1513.

Says Professor Shea, the author of *Ancient Florida*, "The *capitulacion* under which Ponce de Leon sailed was issued at Burgos, Spain, February 23, 1512. He could not possibly, by March 27, have returned to Porto Rico, equipped a vessel, and reached Florida. The letters of the king to Ceron and Diaz, in August and December, 1512, show that Ponce de Leon, after returning to Porto Rico, was prevented from sailing and otherwise employed. The letter written by the king to the authorities in Española, July 4, 1513, shows that he had received from them information that Ponce de Leon had sailed that year."

While it is doubtful if Juan Ponce received his commission directly from the hands of the king, but, rather, through the influence of friends at court (he himself remaining in Porto Rico), there seems to be no doubt that the royal grant empowering him to "proceed to discover and settle the island of

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Bimini" was bestowed the year before he sailed.¹

Some writers allow him two caravels, some three; but all agree that he sailed from Boriquen, or Porto Rico, that he touched at Guanahani on his way to Bimini, and that he had with him as pilot the celebrated Anton de Alaminos, who had been with Columbus on his last voyage when a boy, and who was a native of Palos in Spain. To the fact that Alaminos was with him, doubtless, Juan Ponce owed his immunity from gales and adverse currents, and knowledge of the direct course from Boriquen to San Salvador. That he was with him was ascertained only indirectly through a passage in the *Conquest of Mexico*, by the stout old soldier Captain Bernal Diaz. Describing the first voyage to the coast of Mexico, under direction of Hernandez de Cordova, in 1517,

¹ "And supposing that great ryches might be brought from thence, he returned into Spayne and couenanted with Kynge Ferdinando as touchinge the trade; and by the intercession of Nicolas de Ouando and Peter Nuñez de Guzman, the Kynge did not only make him Gouvernour of Bimini and Florida, but also sent foorth with him three shippes from Sevil, towards his second voyage in the yeere 1515."—Eden's translation of Peter Martyr.

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and the attempt to return, after nearly all the members of the expedition had been wounded, he says: "Having determined to return to the Havannah, by the advice of Alaminos we ran for the coast of Florida, which by his maps, his degrees and altitudes he found to be distant about seventy leagues. With this navigation he was well acquainted, having been in that country on a voyage of discovery with Juan Ponce de Leon. Accordingly, having sailed for four days across the Gulf, we discovered that part of the coast of America to which we were bound."

The reception the Indians gave the discoverers of Mexico, when, wounded and in distress, they touched at the southern coast of Florida to refresh themselves before returning to Cuba, was so similar to that received by Juan Ponce at the hands of the same natives that no apology is offered for quoting the old soldiers' account of it entire.

"When we approached the coast the first object with us was to obtain a supply of water. Our captain, from his wounds and sufferings by thirst, was sinking hourly; on his account, therefore, and our own, twenty of us, of which number I was one, went on shore with the casks. The pilot, Alaminos,

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warned us to be prepared against a sudden attack of the natives, who had in that manner fallen on him in his former visit to this coast. We accordingly put a good guard in an open place near the shore, and proceeded to make wells, in which, to our great satisfaction, we found excellent water. We stayed about an hour, soaking cloths in it and washing our wounds, and this delay enabled the Indians to fall on us, for at the expiration of that period one of our sentinels gave the alarm, a few moments only before they appeared.

“These Indians were very tall of stature, and were clothed in the skins of animals. They assailed us with flights of arrows, by which they wounded six of us, myself among the rest. We, however, beat them off, and they then went to support another body of their countrymen who, in their canoes, had attacked and seized our boat and were dragging it away with them, having wounded Alaminos and four sailors. We followed them close, and, wading above our waists in the water, rescued the boat, leaving in all twenty-two of them dead, and three who were slightly wounded we made prisoners; these, however, died on the voyage.

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“After the natives were driven off we inquired of the soldier who brought the report what had become of his companion. He said that a short time before he saw him go towards the water-side with a hatchet in his hand, to cut a palmetto; that he shortly after heard him cry out, as he supposed when the enemy were putting him to death, and therefore he gave the alarm, the Indians appearing immediately after. This soldier was named Berrio, and he was the only person who escaped without a wound at Pontochan. We went in search of him, and found the tree which he had begun to cut, and the sand much trodden, but no trace of blood, and, of course, concluded that he had been carried off alive. After searching for the space of an hour we gave him up and returned to the vessels with the water, which, when our companions saw, they knew no moderation in their joy. One man in particular leaped into the boat when it came alongside the vessel, and seizing a cask of water, did not stop drinking until he died.”

Alaminos the next year piloted Juan de Grijalva's expedition to Mexico, and in 1519 that of Hernando Cortés, which effected the conquest of that vast country and

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powerful kingdom. In July, 1519, he piloted the first vessel that ever sailed from Mexico to Europe, past the north coast of Cuba, through the Bahama Channel and across the Atlantic, conveying to the king of Spain a portion of the great treasures amassed by Montezuma. He discovered that passage through the island chain known as the Bahama Channel, in fact, and thus passed through the archipelago, in his two voyages in that sea, lengthwise and crosswise. His lengthwise voyage was with Juan Ponce, with whom we have seen him start out, in 1512 or 1513, seeking the wonderful island of Bimini.

Juan Ponce, as we have noted, made harbor in Guanahani, which is about midway the distance, in a straight line, from Porto Rico to Florida, at or near Cape Canaveral. He stayed here several days repairing his vessels (which had been inadequately fitted for the voyage in the haste of departure), and making inquiries of such Indians as he could capture respecting the island containing the fountain.

The Indians of Guanahani did not differ greatly, if at all, from those of Cuba and Hispaniola, but were vastly different from those

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of Florida, who were as warlike and ferocious as the Caribs themselves. If the Bahamans had originally emigrated from the North American continent, long centuries of isolation had made them a distinct people from their northern cousins, for they were as mild and peaceable as the others were fierce and bellicose. "In person," says an historian, "they were of a middle stature, well shaped but rather fleshy, of an olive color, with high foreheads, open countenances, and regular features. Their hair was black, lank, and very thick, sometimes cut short over their ears, and sometimes tied in tresses.

"They were for the most part naked, and their bodies and faces, like those of the North American warriors, were painted, generally red, but sometimes black or white. They were totally ignorant of the use of iron, and the only articles of any value discovered among them were cotton and gold, though the latter was not found in the Bahamas, but came from a distance. Although averse to war, they sometimes found it necessary to arm themselves in self-defence, and on such occasions they made use of javelins pointed with fish-bones. The principal talent they possessed, and which the Spaniards found of

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value, was their extraordinary expertness in diving, having probably been accustomed to subsist on conches obtained in this manner in the Bahamas. On this account they were generally transported by the Spaniards still farther south than Hispaniola, and employed in the pearl fishery on the island of Cubagua, coast of Cumana in South America. It is said that one hundred and fifty ducats, at that time a large price, was often given at Hispaniola for a diver of the Bahamas. They survived, however, but a few years under the dominion of their oppressors.

A few were taken along by Juan Ponce's orders, not to be sold as slaves, but to assist in securing provisions in the shape of conches from the sea, and to guide the vessels through the tortuous channels. Bimini, the *vieja* said, was still to the northward and westward, and in that direction the craft were steered. Several of the *Lucayos* (as the Bahamas were called by the natives) were visited in succession, but still the evasive Bimini eluded pursuit. Keys and islands, reefs and rocks, in the great chain, number more than two thousand, and Juan Ponce could not visit them all, even had he the time, as the archipelago was then unchart-

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ed, and the location of but a few was known.

In looking for an island, however, he discovered a continent, for, after Alaminos had safely piloted him through the labyrinth of coral reefs into the Gulf Stream, he was borne along the coast of the peninsula to which, from its having been first seen on Easter Sunday—in Spanish, *Pascua Florida*—he gave the name by which it has been distinguished ever since. The Indian name of the country was *Cautio*, or *Cancio*, but, first seen as it was, at the height of the vernal season, with fields and forests abloom with gay-colored flowers, the name bestowed upon it, of the “florid,” or “flowery,” land, was peculiarly appropriate, not only, says the Spanish historian, “on account of the day in which it was discovered, but because of the exceeding beauty of its groves.”

It was, however, a “promised land” into which Ponce de Leon was not to enter save through toil and suffering. He never really entered it, in fact, but coasted its shores, from the point at which land was first seen, probably at or near the site of the present St. Augustine (which was founded fifty-two years later), to the extreme tip of the

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peninsula, thence northward on the Gulf coast, probably to the bay of Appalachee. The date of discovery was March 27, 1513, but storms and adverse currents prevented him from landing until April 2d, when he took possession, with the customary ceremonies, in the name of his sovereign.

His northernmost landing on the Atlantic coast was at north latitude thirty degrees and eight minutes, between St. Augustine and the mouth of the St. John's River. Thence he turned southward, doubled Cape Canaveral, and struggled for weeks against the Gulf Stream currents, until he had coasted the keys as far as the westernmost group, which he called the Tortugas, because they were the abode of innumerable sea-turtles. They are known by the name he gave them to-day, as also is a bay north of Cape Sable and west of the Everglades, which is still on the maps as the "Gulf of Ponce de Leon." He attempted to land at various points among the mangrove-bordered cays, or keys, and did succeed in obtaining wood and water from one of them, as well as in careening a caravel which was in need of repairs; but everywhere he met with a hostile reception from the natives—the fierce, implacable

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Yemassees, ever alert to repel an invasion of their territory.

The peninsula of Florida was inhabited by various tribes of Indians, the Yemassees being the southernmost and the Appalachees the northernmost, but all were warlike. They opposed Ponce de Leon, Narvaez, and De Soto; and the fighting qualities of their descendants were tested more than three hundred years later, by soldiers of the United States, during the long and protracted Seminole War. Those met by Narvaez and De Soto, however, were, with the exception of the Appalachees, less ferocious than the Yemassees of the east coast and the keys, though brave to rashness in defence of their homes.

In connecting with the famed Bimini fable a gushing stream of crystal water, delicious tropical fruits, and an abundant supply of the precious metal, the natives seem to have assigned to the island-paradise just those things in which the Bahamas are most deficient. In appearance only some of the islands are attractive and tropical, for though their beaches are beautiful, the waters that lave them clear and transparent, the vegetation is far from luxuriant, gold

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in a native state is unknown, while springs and streams are almost unknown. Ponce de Leon, then, was seeking something that existed only in the Indians' fancy, and probably the story was an adaptation of some shrewd medicine-man's conception of the heavenly paradise which he and those who obeyed his teachings were to possess in the world to come.

Whatever it may have been, and wherever located, Juan Ponce de Leon did not discover it, though in coasting the keys he found many an islet abounding in wild life of various sorts, such as snowy herons and gaudy flamingoes, bulky pelicans and graceful egrets, with turtles so numerous that his sailors caught them by the hundred.

After pursuing his voyage along the gulf coast of Florida until, it is thought, it trended decidedly westward—which would have taken him at least to Appalachee Bay—Juan Ponce turned about and retraced his course to and around the southern tip of the peninsula with its fringe of keys, and across the strait of Florida to the Bahamas. On his way thither he passed very near the small island which to-day bears the name of Bimini, and said to contain the fabulous

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spring with healing waters. It lies westward from a group called the Berry Islands, and northwest from New Providence, on which is Nassau, the capital and chief settlement of the Bahamas. This islet he failed to discover, but a trusty captain in his fleet, Juan Perez de Ortubia, guided by another old woman, succeeded in finding it, after Juan Ponce had passed on to Porto Rico.

On the return voyage, the island now known as "Bahama" was visited for the first time, and a group which also bore an aboriginal name, the Lucayos, thought to be identical with the great and little Abaco. One islet of the group the governor called La Vieja, because the only inhabitant discovered there was a lone old woman, who, like the female guide from Porto Rico, professed to know all about Bimini and the Fountain of Youth. She and the vieja from Boriquen compared notes, so to speak, and the result was the discovery of Bimini, just mentioned, for Juan Ponce de Leon took one old woman, and Juan Perez the other, and scoured the chain from one end to the other. The old woman from the Bahamas, being a Lucayo, was the successful one, for when Juan Perez overtook his commander,

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off the coast of Boriquen, he confirmed the story of an island with verdure and a spring of crystal clearness, but could not vouch for the efficacy of its waters. As neither of the viejas grew any younger, or more comely, and as Juan Ponce de Leon made no haste to return to the northern Bahamas (allowing seven or eight years to elapse before he did so), it is doubtful if the story of Juan Perez gained credence.

The two voyages of Ponce de Leon through the Bahamas, in 1513 and 1521, were the last the Spaniards made in that direction for many years, all their time being given to the development of regions more productive in precious metals. As gold was discovered in Hispaniola during the first voyage of Columbus, and afterwards in Darien, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru, their attention was drawn thither to the exclusion of all other places. Only when the chain was traversed by some galleon going for, or laden with, gold and silver from the mines of "terra firma" were the Bahamas brought to mind.

After the English had discovered what fine harbors some of the islands contained, with fishing and turtling in the waters

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around them, the Bahamas became the resort of British sailors. Then it was found that these harbors, as well as the channels between the islands, and many an obscure haven (into which a craft of shallow draught could sail, but not a merchantman deep-laden), were well situated for privateering and piracy. Thus they became the resorts of those "brethren of the sea," the buccaneers, and later of out-and-out pirates like "Black-beard" Tench, whose wild career of murder and lawlessness was ended only when brave Lieutenant Maynard sailed into a harbor on the North Carolina coast with his head at the end of his bowsprit.

XV

BECERRICO THE BLOOD-HOUND

1514

NO immediate results followed the discovery of Florida, for Juan Ponce was not prepared to follow it up either with a conquest of its inhabitants or the implanting of a settlement. He did not know, in fact, whether it might be called an island or a continent, and for several years thereafter had in mind another expedition to settle that question. He was the first to traverse the Bahamas, however, the first to reveal the existence of islands until that time unknown, but not the first (modern geographers assert) to trace the coastal outlines of that peninsula by him called Florida.

Twenty years before he made his exploration (as we have already hinted in a previous chapter), Columbus barely missed landing on the coast of Florida by holding a few points to the southward of his main course,

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towards the last of it. But he was diverted still farther to the south by reports of gold occurring in Cuba and Haiti, and never after that did he make a more northern latitude than on his first voyage. Southward, ever southward, his star seems to have beckoned him, though always with an inclination westward, for he was trying to break through the barriers of a continent that intervened between him and the Pacific, then unknown.

Between 1492 and the date of Juan Ponce's voyage through the Bahamas, it is declared on pretty good evidence, some one, "name and nationality unknown," but the latter supposed to be Portuguese, made a voyage to and around the peninsula, because a map was made of it in 1502. This is called the "Cantino map," since it was made by, or for, one Alberto Cantino, a correspondent in Portugal of the Duke of Ferrara. Although the map made in 1500 by Juan de la Cosa, one-time companion of Columbus, outlines the Atlantic coast of North America from about the latitude of Newfoundland southward to that of a point north of Cuba, it does not do so correctly. The configuration of Flor-

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ida is not given, while in the Cantino map it is sufficiently approximate to be easily identified. The relative position, also, of Florida and Cuba (on the map as "Isla Isabella") is correct, although the longitudinal axis of the island runs the wrong way. But this is an unimportant particular with the cartographers of that time, who were accustomed to fill unknown regions with droves of elephants or lions, and untraversed seas with dolphins, whales, and mermaids. The Cantino map of itself indicates that somebody viewed the coast of Florida previous to 1502, and it has been conjectured that this individual might have been the Portuguese navigator Gaspar Corteal, who made a voyage in 1500, and was lost in another the following year.

Allowing Sebastian Cabot's claim, that he and his father ran down the entire Atlantic coast in 1497; or that advanced by an ardent eulogist of Amerigo Vespucci, that he sailed from Florida to the Gulf of St. Lawrence the same year, we may have material for a map, date 1502, without looking further. Still, whoever made the voyage did not report it, or at least did not claim the discovery; so the credit remains

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with Juan Ponce de Leon, as that for revealing to Europe the New World, America, belongs to Christopher Columbus, in despite of what the Norsemen accomplished—and allowed to lapse into oblivion.

Historian Harrisse says: "Between the end of the year 1500 and the summer of 1502, navigators, whose names and nationality are unknown, but whom we presume to be Spaniards, discovered, explored, and named the part of the shores of the United States which from the vicinity of Pensacola Bay runs along the Gulf of Mexico to the Cape of Florida, and, turning it, runs northward along the Atlantic coast to about the mouth of the Chesapeake or Hudson." But Historian Harrisse is equally "at sea" respecting this voyage and these voyagers, with the Brazilian Viscount Varnhagen, who advanced the theory that Vespucci must have made a voyage in 1497, somewhere or other, but probably along the Atlantic coast of North America.

Whoever went before Juan Ponce de Leon to the coast of Florida, he was the first to bring away positive information of that "great country of Bimini," known only to the Lucayos, from the traditions of whom,

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most probably, Peter Martyr published, in 1511, a map on which is a large island of that name. He reached Boriquen, on the homeward voyage, September 21st, and, from the meagre accounts that have been preserved, seems to have been greatly elated over his successful voyage. It was not successful so far as the gaining of treasure was concerned, for scarcely a grain of gold was found on the trip; nor in the discovery of rich and opulent cities, for not a structure larger than an Indian hut capable of sheltering a score or so of persons had been seen; neither was a settlement made, or plantation attempted, though his patent from the king was issued for the special purpose of "discovering and settling the island of Bimini."

The discovery seems not to have attracted general attention at the time outside the islands, for the editions of "Ptolemy" which appear within the next decade or so do not make note of it, nor does "Florida" appear on any map for a long time thereafter. A map of 1529, eight years after Juan Ponce's death, has on it, in relatively their exact positions, the isles named by Ponce the "Martyrs" and "Tortugas," as well as the

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native name of Florida, which was Canico. Geographical information was slowly diffused in those days, and it may be imagined that Juan Ponce, a gallant soldier, but an unlettered cavalier, was out of touch with the few cartographers in Spain.

But the discoverer himself considered his achievement important enough to warrant a voyage to Spain, for the purpose of making a report in person to King Ferdinand. He did not go, however, until the next year, in the spring or early summer, as he found affairs in the island demanding his attention for several months after his return. The Indians were still in a state of unrest, though lacking courage for an uprising—or rather, it should be said, an intelligent head to guide them. In the few short years since the invasion of the Spaniards, the Boriqueños had dwindled appreciably, many having been killed in the mines and on the plantations. The year before Juan Ponce sailed on his expedition, or in 1512, the introduction of negro slaves from Africa was agitated, to take the place of the Indians. The latter were not only too weak to endure severe and continuous labor, but their spirits were too lofty to submit to oppression with-

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out the most destructive consequences. Bands of them, following the example set by the Indians of Cuba, wandered into the forests and committed suicide by hanging, rather than continue in the hopeless condition to which the Spaniards had reduced them.

Juan Ponce was told of the conditions prevailing, and his advice sought by the settlers, who were almost as despairing as the natives, but for different reasons. They could not work the lands without native assistance; they could not amass fortunes without owning or controlling large numbers of Indians as slaves, and the rascals, they said, were hanging themselves faster than they could be caught and trained. A conference was held in the Casa Blanca, soon after Ponce's arrival home, the upshot of which was that he promised to journey through the island and examine into the subject. He had vast plantations of his own, which, his major-domos told him, were "going to the dogs," and supposedly rich mines, which could not be worked on account of the obstinacy of those "children of the devil," the Indians.

Setting out with an escort of cavaliers, in addition to a small body of retainers—as

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the major-domos, or stewards of the castle and estates, the *superintendentes*, or overseers of the mines, etc. — Juan Ponce once again made the rounds of Boriquen. First he visited an estate in the valley where he was cultivating a large area in maize and making experiments with sugar-cane, which had been introduced into Hispaniola nearly twenty years before, and was then perfectly at home in the West Indies. Broad fields of both beneficent plants, the maize and the cane, were then in luxuriant growth, with waving leaves and tasselled tops, reaching to the shoulders of the Spaniards as they sat on horseback. The first sugar-cane in the islands had come from the Canaries, that group of islands off the coast of Africa which had been made the half-way station, or tarrying-place, of all the early voyagers to America. Maize, or Indian-corn, was an indigenous product, first seen by Columbus in 1492, the golden grains of which were taken by him to Spain and thus introduced into Europe. Here were both plants, the one a native and the other an exotic, meeting on common ground and mingling their leaves in a magnificent display such as only the tropics can produce.

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But for the maize and the cassava, which were universally cultivated throughout the West Indies, the Spaniards might not have conquered the natives so quickly, as they furnished the strangers the chief part of their supplies, and kept many a cut-throat crew from starving. But for the sugar-cane there might have been no importing of negro slaves from Africa to take the place of natives worn to death by unceasing toil. The constantly increasing area devoted to cane and corn demanded an increased labor supply, Ponce de Leon's major-domos told him, and he could see for himself that the Indians were not adequate. The country had been scoured far and near, and there was not a family within miles and miles that had not a representative on the estate, perhaps; yet behold, they said, the meagre results! There were many square miles of the richest soil, inexhaustible in its fertility, yet with their utmost efforts they could not cultivate a tenth part of the acres then available.

Juan Ponce mused upon what his servants told him, but did not immediately declare himself. He inspected the rude sugar-mills—*trapiches de buyey* they were called, on

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account of the power being furnished by oxen, or bullocks; he tasted the sugar crystallizing in the pans, and inspected the quarters of the laborers. It was then the beginning of the harvest season, when, if ever, they should be sleek and contented, from having their cravings satisfied by the delicious juice of the cane; but he found them lean and discontented. Many were too ill to work, some had recently died, and all were unhappy. They were suffering from no malady known to the overseers, unless it were homesickness; but, without strength to wield the heavy hoe all day long, and without spirit or ambition, they simply sank in their tracks, withered away, and died.

Juan Ponce pondered long, then he said: "Negroes from Africa are now out of the question, for first they must be captured by the Portuguese, then they must be purchased from the Portuguese, after a long voyage across the Atlantic. I have no gold with which to make the purchases, having exhausted nearly all my fortune in the voyage to and from Bimini; and if I had, it would be folly to waste it, when the great God, in his wisdom, has provided slaves

BECERRICO THE BLOOD-HOUND

for labor near at hand. These are truly in bad shape; but, forsooth, are there no others obtainable when these shall be gone?"

"The island is nearly exhausted of able-bodied men," replied the overseer, "and as well of women and children. But I have word of a colony of mountaineers—Caribs, they tell me—far up on the shoulders of Luquillo. These might be impressed."

"Might be!" declared Juan Ponce de Leon, hotly. "Nay, man, they *must* be! Our cultivation cannot go on without them, and, by the saints! that is of vastly more importance to us than their freedom to them. How far is it? Why cannot we go now and capture them?"

"Not so far," rejoined the overseer. "Perhaps a day and a night. But the way is rough, and at the end we may find some opposition."

"And have we never found it before—and overcome it, prithee? Here we stay to-night, and to-morrow we start. So few, you say? Enough we are to rout a thousand of those *perros*—dogs of Indians. We all are armed and mounted; and, besides, see ye not our good friend Becerrico? A hundred alone he could put to flight."

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The great blood-hound, Becerrico, had been left to guard the castle and its contents while his master was away in the Bahamas, and nobly had he done his duty. Aware that he was on guard at Casa Blanca, no Indian dared approach it by day or by night; so Juan Ponce had no hesitation in leaving his family and servants there. Upon his return, however, the blood-hound had seemed to consider his obligation as to the castle fulfilled, and had attached himself to his master once more. Thus he was with him on the tour of inspection, and the next morning, as the cavalcade left the hacienda, he marched proudly in the van. The way was toilsome and difficult, owing to the rugged nature of the forest-covered hill-sides. The great mountain was reached, and partially ascended, by sunset, when a camp was made, the horses picketed, and supper prepared for the weary cavaliers. They had no beds or hammocks, but when sleep overtook them lay down upon the ground wrapped in their cloaks; for all were veterans and used to exposure.

No sentinel was posted, though they were then quite near the Indian settlement, for the ever-alert Becerrico stood guard through-

BECERRICO THE BLOOD-HOUND

out the night, and no other was needed. In the morning, at daybreak, he woke the sleepers with a deep-mouthed growl, as he was too intelligent to bark, with an enemy not far away, and an hour later they were off on the trail again. Instead of taking a day and a night, Juan Ponce thought it better to make the journey by daylight, hence progress was more rapid than if the other course had been pursued, and half the forenoon had not gone before the end was near.

The termination of their toilsome efforts came abruptly, at the base of a steep cliff, upon the summit of which, the guide said, the Indians had their fortified village. There was no path, apparently, by which the cliff could be scaled, but it rose sheer before them, an insuperable obstacle to their advance. There was no path—that is, for horse and soldier to take—but there was a trace, or trail, a few inches wide, along the face of the cliff, which an Indian, sure of foot, might follow. In fact, one had been over it recently, for the scent was so strong that Becerrico followed it fast and furiously, leaving his master and comrades gazing stupidly after him as he bounded upward.

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Soon their ears were assailed by shrieks, with which was mingled the baying of the hound, and they knew that Indians had been found, though they were hidden from sight by a curvature of the cliff. Suddenly there arose above the shrieks of women and children the shrill war-cry of the Caribs, followed by a howl of pain and distress from the hound. Then (even while his master cried out that Becerrico was hurt unto death, and he must go to his rescue) the dog bounded into sight, as though hurled by a giant, and, rolling from one rocky projection to another, finally fell at the base of the cliff, bleeding from ghastly wounds, and apparently lifeless.

XVI

ADELANTADO OF FLORIDA

1514

AMONG those who darted to the spot where Becerrico had fallen, his master was foremost, and dragging him out of the shade into the sunlight, proceeded to examine his wounds. There were several slight ones, made by darts and arrows, but the cause of his discomfiture was found in a great gash across his forehead, evidently made by a fragment of rock hurled with terrific force. Water was brought by willing hands, and the wound cleansed of blood and gravel by Juan Ponce, who muttered maledictions against the Indians, while he labored to restore the brute to consciousness. He was at last successful, and Becerrico feebly attempted to stand up and lick his hand, though unable to walk for quite a while thereafter. After ordering a litter to be made, in which to convey the hound

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back to the coast, Juan Ponce turned to his companions and said: "Can it be that we, the conquerors of this island, must allow yon Indians to insult us thus? Are we, then, turned poltroons, or is the ascent impossible?"

It was decided to be impossible to assault the savages in their stronghold from that point, without scaling-ladders and a strong party of support; but it grieved Ponce de Leon sorely to accept this conclusion of his comrades. He knew that he and they were helpless, with only their swords as weapons, and without an arquebusier, or cross-bowman, in the party. As if to emphasize their helplessness, an arrow came hurtling down from the cliffs above and sank itself feather-deep in the body of Juan Ponce's horse, behind the saddle-housings. The stricken brute reared, turned its eyes imploringly towards its master, and then fell heavily to the ground. After a few convulsive struggles it lay still, and as the cavaliers gathered about they whispered, awesomely: "Dead! Killed by a poisoned arrow!"

"Strip him quickly," Juan Ponce hoarsely commanded his servants, "and let us get away, ere other poisoned darts prevent us.

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My faith, but it irks me to retreat from a foe which I've already beaten—or thought I had! But we will return, my comrades, and then we shall have bowmen with us, and musketeers, as well as lombardiers—I trow—even if I divest my castle of its cannon."

It was a sorry procession that wended its way down the wooded steeps of Luquillo towards the coast. The stout old cavalier, Juan Ponce, was on foot, limping beside the litter containing Becerrico, and lamenting his loss, of steed as well as hound. Other mounts were offered him, but he would have none of them, saying, remorsefully: "It is I and an old man's foolishness that have this misfortune brought to ye, caballeros, and it is I, Juan Ponce, who shall suffer for it; though no more than to foot it into San Juan were the extent of my penance."

At last the coast was reached, and the castle of Casa Blanca opened its gates to the downcast cavaliers on horseback, the foot-sore Juan Ponce, and the train of attendants bearing the hound and the harness of the steed that was slain. Doña Inez and her children gazed in wonder mingled with sadness through the crenelles

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of the battlements, and they all but cried aloud in their grief at sight of faithful Becerrico stretched on a litter. When they saw the lord of the castle, however, haltingly approaching on foot, they could contain themselves no longer, but wept in unison, for they knew, not only that Juan Ponce was sore distressed, but that his horse, the gallant steed all in the castle knew and loved, had been killed.

Well, this was not so happy a homecoming for Juan Ponce de Leon as that from Bimini and Florida, nor was there any whit of satisfaction in it; and to soothe his outraged feelings he resolved to leave the island for a while, and perform that long-contemplated voyage to Spain. He waited only to assure himself of Becerrico's convalescence, and then, leaving him again the warden of the castle, trimmed his sails for the nearest port in Spain. Yet again was the faithful Doña Inez left with the children Juan Ponce was the father of, while the galliard cavalier hied himself off across the ocean. But home, and wife, and children (he might have said) would surely await his return, be it never so late; while the king's favor waited no more than time or the tide

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upon the king's subjects. Months had elapsed since his return from the Bahamas, yet Juan Ponce, who would fain be made adelantado of the lands he had discovered, found himself idling and dallying here, with Ferdinand's court and Ferdinand's favor two thousand miles away. He would no longer delay going to court, there to garner the harvest he had sown, there to bask in the sunlight of royalty, which he had denied himself so long.

The voyage to Spain was accomplished without incident, and eventually Juan Ponce reached the royal court, where Ferdinand received him in a manner according with his expectations. His fame had long since preceded him, his deeds had been trumpeted throughout the land, and especially had he made himself renowned by his quest for the Fountain of Youth. Some of the vapid courtiers affected to treat his adventure with disdain, and lost no opportunity to rally him about it, saying that it could not have been successful, else Juan Ponce would not then have seemed so grizzled and infirm. They had expected, they said, to see him young and agile, with flowing locks, and beard unstreaked with silver; but in-

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stead, behold a gray-beard and a bald-head, exceedingly stiff in the joints!

It was while awaiting reception by the king, the court being then at Burgos for the time, that the beardless witlings assailed the veteran with their jibes and quips, having no respect for his age nor pride in his achievements. They were stay-at-home courtiers, who had never fleshed a sword or held lance at an enemy, and for such as they the old soldier had nothing but contempt. He would not have vouchsafed them notice of any sort; but their gibes touched him in a tender spot, for he certainly had hoped, perhaps expected, to receive rejuvenation in the waters of Bimini.

"The callow striplings!" he muttered, savagely, beneath his breath. "*Poco barba, poco verguenza* (Little beard, little modesty). It is a true saying, and surely these cubs exemplify the same." But aloud he said, grimly smiling upon the youth who thought to tease him: "*Antes de mil años todos seremos calvos, caballeros* (In less than a thousand years we shall all be bald, gentlemen). Thus the proverb, you know, and sooth it may be true." The shouts and laughter that went up were not at his ex-



KING FERDINAND

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pense, and the echoes had hardly ceased ringing through the hall when an attendant came out with a command for him to appear before the king. Accompanied by his friend and former patron, Pero Nuñez de Guzman, grand knight-commander of Calatrava, Ponce de Leon went into an audience with his sovereign.

Ferdinand was then suffering from the illness that finally terminated in his death, two years later, and was greatly changed from the gay, light-hearted monarch whom Juan Ponce remembered as the consort of Queen Isabella. Since he had last seen the king, Isabella had departed, and within a year of her death Ferdinand had married the niece of Louis XII. of France. A child was born to them the very year that Juan Ponce first set foot in Boriquen, but lived only a short while, and thus a new grief was added to the burden borne by Ferdinand—a burden which became greater and heavier as he neared the grave.

But though overborne by cares and greatly afflicted, the king received Juan Ponce most graciously, and a trace of his former gayety appeared in flashes, which set the awkward soldier at his ease when he

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came to proffer his request for a patent similar to that which had been granted Columbus.

“Aha!” said the king, with a laugh. “So my gallant conquistador would be another Colon? But nay, Juan Ponce de Leon. When we signed that capitulation with Cristobal Colon, you must recall, nothing was known of the world he sailed to soon thereafter. He had faith to believe there was a world; but we were sceptical, and, owning it not, of course gave him all he asked. But, let me say, it is one thing to grant boundless power when nothing is expected to come of it, and quite another to do so when success is almost certain, or at least taken for granted! My faith! Haven’t those capitulations been as thorns in my side ever since the return of Colon from his voyage? Never was such a rapacious varlet let loose upon the world before; and never, with my concurrence, will such another be!

“But tell me, Juan Ponce, of your adventures, and describe to me the country you fain would govern. Letters you have sent me, truly; but I have had scant time to peruse them, having been engaged in this

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business with France and Navarre, the which is hardly settled yet. Now proceed, and you will find me a good listener—for the space of a half-hour, but no longer.”

Modestly, even diffidently, Juan Ponce related the things that had happened to him in the years since he had left Spain with Columbus, then more than twenty in number, dwelling especially upon the invasion of Boriquen and the voyage to Florida. He made it evident that he would like to return and settle the newly discovered country, even though he had a castle and estates in Boriquen, so that it was a gracious thing in the king to exclaim, when Juan Ponce had ceased: “Enough! enough! You shall be governor over the islands you have found, and also adelantado of Bimini and Florida!”

King Ferdinand dismissed the soldier with a smile, cutting short his expressions of gratitude by a command to have him taken to the apartments of Queen Germaine, where she and her ladies-in-waiting, he said, would doubtless be glad to hear his story. The bluff old warrior was more alarmed at the prospect of an audience with the young queen than he had ever been in the presence

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of any enemy whatever; but his sovereign's word was law, and he was led away disconsolate.

But the fair Germaine was not so terrible, he found, after he had been duly presented, and as both the queen and her ladies were perishing of ennui (as they would have expressed it had they told the truth), they gladly welcomed the advent of this gallant cavalier, old as to years, perhaps, though youthful at heart. After the crust of reserve had been broken, Juan Ponce found himself going over with enthusiasm the record of his deeds on land and sea. He told his tale so modestly, yet with such an air of truth and honesty, that his auditors were charmed. Again and again, as he made to retire, they exclaimed against his leaving until another story was forthcoming. Their flattering attention might have turned the head of a weaker man than this sturdy fighter, who was more at home in camp than in court; but the blandishments of beauty were ever lost upon Juan Ponce de Leon.

When he had gone, one of the fair ladies said, with a sigh: "Ah me, your majesty, was he not grand? Such an air of noble

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dignity, withal he is scarce above medium height, and the portliness of advancing age might mar his figure were he not in armor."

"Yes, as you say, this cavalier is more than interesting," the queen is said to have replied in effect. "I like his deep-set eyes, so black and flashing, the poise of his sturdy shoulders, and the luxuriant beard that ripples down to his corselet. We see few such nowadays—adventurers who have been across the world and helped to conquer it. I almost envy those who lived at court when the great events were happening that shaped the history of Spain."

"They tell me," said another lady, "that knights were more courtly and more venturesome, e'en though it be but twenty years ago, when the Moslems dwelt within Granada. Each knight served one fair mistress, and for her dared death in single combat with the Moor. Think of the exploit of Garcilasso, who slew the giant Moor before the mosque of Granada, now consecrated as a church! And this cavalier saw all these things, and was part of them, perchance."

Interest in the exploits of Ponce de Leon was not confined solely to the ladies of the

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court, for he was warmly welcomed everywhere as the romantic yet hard-headed cavalier who had made a voyage expressly for the purpose of discovering the secret of eternal youth. Had he not made it, some other would have, for the country had in it adventurers as quixotic as Ponce de Leon. "The Spaniard" [of that time] says the talented author of *Ferdinand and Isabella*, "was a knight-errant in its literal sense, roving over seas on which no bark had ever ventured, among islands and continents where no civilized man had ever trodden, and which fancy peopled with all the marvels and drear enchantments of romance; courting danger in every form, combating everywhere, and everywhere victorious. The very odds presented by the defenceless natives among whom he was cast, 'a thousand of whom,' to quote the words of Columbus, 'were not equal to three Spaniards,' was in itself typical of his profession; and the brilliant destinies to which the meanest adventurer was often called (now carving out with his good sword some 'El Dorado' more splendid than fancy had ever dreamed of, and now overturning some old, barbaric dynasty), were fully as extraordinary as the

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wildest chimeras which Ariosto ever sang or Cervantes satirized."

It is true, moreover, that "his countrymen who remained at home, feeding greedily on the reports of his adventures, lived almost equally in the atmosphere of romance. A spirit of chivalrous enthusiasm penetrated the very depths of the nation, swelling the humblest individual with lofty aspirations, and a proud consciousness of the dignity of his nature." In this spirit the countrymen of Ponce de Leon welcomed him to Spain, and sped him forth again on his voyage, when, after several months had passed away, everything had been arranged for another expedition. According to the terms of the "capitulation" with the king, he was to have exclusive right to the "island" of Florida and Bimini, settle it at his own cost, and be called, and entitled to be called, "adelantado." But the king was to construct and garrison forts in the island, "send agents to divide the Indians among the settlers, and receive, first a tenth, afterwards a fifth, of all gold that might be found."¹

¹ *Asiento y capitulacion que se hizo demas con Joan Ponce de Leon sobre la ysla Bimini y la isla Florida.*

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This capitulation, or contract, was signed on September 27, 1514, and shortly after the king ordered the fitting out of three ships, to be well manned and well armed, at the port of Seville. He aided Juan Ponce to that extent, and he extended the time for the conquest and settlement of the country from three years after the time it was dated, to three years from the day of sailing.

In the *Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos*, volume of *Asientos y capitulaciones*, 1508-1574.

XVII

SEEKING THE MAN-EATERS

1515

“FURTHERMORE, one Johannes Ponceius [John Ponce] was sente foorth with three shyppes to destroye ye Canibales, bothe in the lande [mainland, ‘terra firma’] and Ilandes thereabout; as well that the nations of the more humane and innocente people maye at the lengthe lyve without feare of that pestiferous generation, as also the better and more safely to search the secretes and rychesse of those regions.”¹

¹ This reference to Ponce de Leon and his expedition to the cannibal islands is from the sixth book of the third decade of Martyr’s *De Orbe Novo*, as translated by Richard Eden, and published in 1555. Eden (born 1521, died 1576) was a learned scholar, educated at Cambridge, who translated into English many works on travel, geography, and navigation. He was a pioneer in the field, and his *Treatyse of the Newe India* is called “the first intelligible description of America in English.” His *Decades of the Newe World*, as he entitled his translation of Martyr’s work, followed two years later.

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In these words the ancient chronicler sets forth the expedition of John Ponce de Leon for the subjugation and enslaving of the Caribs, or cannibals, Indians who lived in the small islands south of Boriquen, between it and the coast of South America. Our hero had gone to Spain for permission from the king to conquer and settle the country he had discovered, which lay to the northwest of Boriquen, and this had been granted willingly; but, as an after-thought, Ferdinand had made the proviso that he should first attack, and if possible bring to terms, the fierce Caribs who so often ravaged the islands lying to the north of their abodes. This stipulation was not at all to the liking of Juan Ponce, though it was probably the result of his own representations to the crown respecting the cannibals, who, having been placed by the sovereigns beyond the pale of mercy, could be enslaved and made objects of traffic, on account of their reputation as devourers of human flesh.

Whether he relished the prospect of a Carib campaign or not, he was committed to it beyond peradventure, and instead of sailing direct to Porto Rico, on his return to

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home and castle at San Juan, he was obliged to make a long *détour* to the southward, following the route taken by Columbus on his second voyage.

He entered upon preparation for the voyage most reluctantly, as appears, for several months went by before he "beat up" for recruits, or made known his desire for settlers to accompany him to Florida. When he did so, at last, his proffers were not responded to with alacrity, for few there were who desired to take that roundabout voyage to Florida and the Bahamas, by way of the Caribbee Islands.

Another reason may have operated upon Juan Ponce to protract his stay in Spain, and this was a very natural reluctance to leaving the land of his birth, where his family was held in such great esteem and he himself so highly honored, and launch upon another venture, the labors of which might, and probably would, be greatly in excess of its rewards. Although he had passed twenty years, in conflict with Indians and with the varied forces of nature, in a region which was itself inimical to man's well-being, he had not become so seasoned to toil and dangers that he could not highly appreciate the re-

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laxations of his life at court and as the guest of Spain's great men, all of whom were glad to honor him. He met and may have been entertained by the erudite Ximenes, cardinal, and commander of forces that had won success in war. The cardinal's great victory over the Moslems of Oran, north coast of Africa, was accomplished by the warlike prelate in the very year that Ponce de Leon invaded Boriquen, and it would be strange if each had not heard of and admired the prowess of the other.

There was still another whom Juan Ponce could not have failed to meet, since both were in Spain at the same time, and this was Gonsalvo de Cordova, *el Gran Capitan*, or the Great Captain, of the Italian wars. He was then living sumptuously, but in retirement and out of favor with the king, at his castle of Loja, province of Granada. This hero of the wars with the Moors, and especially in Italy, could have told the humbler conqueror something respecting the inconstancy of Ferdinand's favor had he been disposed to do so—and that he was so disposed, no one who has read his history can doubt, for he had no fear of the king and very little

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regard for him. But it was not on account of mistrust of the king that Ponce de Leon hesitated about embarking, so much as lack of means for purchasing the fleet's equipment.

When at last he set sail from Spain he bade farewell forever not only to Spain's Catholic sovereign, but to its great captain and its great cardinal as well, for all died within three years of his visit. Gonsalvo went first on the last great journey, departing in December, 1515, and Ferdinand in January, 1516. "Since Ferdinand ascended the throne," wrote his biographer, he had seen no less than four kings of England, as many of France, and also of Naples, three of Portugal, two German emperors, and half a dozen popes. As to his own subjects, scarcely one of all those familiar to the reader in the course of our history now survived, except, indeed, the Nestor of his time, the octogenarian Ximenes." The cardinal, however, did not linger long behind his master, for his death took place in November, 1517.

Juan Ponce de Leon outlived them all; and though at that period he was relatively obscure, and had achieved no great, wide-

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spread renown, his name is now regarded as hardly secondary to that of the Great Captain, whose fame is more to his countrymen than to the world at large.

It was in January, 1515, that Ponce de Leon sailed on his expedition to the Caribbee Islands, with instructions first to assail the insular marauders, overcome them, destroy their villages and canoes, and then proceed to do the same to those of Terra Firma, on the north coast of South America, between Cape de la Vela and Cartagena. He steered a straight course for the island of Guacana, which was renamed Guadalupe by Columbus, who had discovered it on his second voyage, in 1493.

The Indians of the Lesser Antilles, as the Carib archipelago is sometimes called, were probably distantly related to the fierce Guajiras of the main, or Terra Firma, but there may have been no connection between them for hundreds of years. So far as the evidence afforded by relics and traditions informs us, the savages who then inhabited the Caribbees had come from the south, from the Orinoco country of Venezuela and the wilds of Guiana. Just when they left their native region and invaded the volcanic

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islands which form a connecting chain between Porto Rico and Trinidad, off the Orinoco's mouths, is not known, but it was at a time far distant in the misty past.

They had been so long there at the time Columbus discovered the islands that no vestige remained of the original inhabitants, who are supposed to have been Arawaks. No vestige, that is, save traces of the language they spoke, and half-breed descendants resulting from the marriage of the females of the Arawak tribe with the Carib warriors. For, while the invading Caribs, it is said, killed all the adult males and old women, they spared the marriageable females and the children of either sex. The boys were saved to become warriors, and trained so carefully that, after arriving at an age permitting them to hold the bow and shoot an arrow, they were not allowed anything to eat unless they had first shot it from a tree in which it was suspended. Thus they became most expert bowmen, and made no little trouble for Juan Ponce, as we shall find further on in this narrative. Conclusive and pathetic testimony as to the Caribs' barbarous custom of murdering their male enemies and preserving the females is found

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even to-day among their descendants, for some of the women have a speech different from that of the men and the tribe in general.

When Columbus, in 1493, arrived at Dominica, an island about midway the arc of the chain, he found, as reported by the chroniclers, positive evidence that the Caribs were cannibals, in the presence of human bones hanging up in their huts and human flesh cooking in a vessel over a fire. Some writers have since claimed that these bones suspended from the roof-trees of the huts were the revered remains of their ancestors—for that custom of preserving the departed prevails to-day in Guiana, the country from which they emigrated. And the flesh cooking over the fires was not that of human beings, but of the iguana and aguti, the first a lizard with very white and tender meat, and the second a small quadruped something like a hare.

But it served the humor of Columbus at that time to declare these newly discovered people cannibals—a word, by-the-way, derived from their own language, in which it is *canniba*. It served his purpose to do so, because his sovereigns had declared all *anthropophagi* to be exempt from the

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restrictions they had placed upon the enslaving of other Indians, and subject to perpetual captivity. Columbus knew that there would be a demand for slaves to work the mines, perform menial labor, and cultivate the plantations, and, with an eye to the future, proclaimed these people just what he desired them to be. He purposed returning, some time in the near future, to capture all he could of these anthropophagi, so conveniently located on the southern route from Hispaniola to Spain, and fill his ships with slaves.

That he did not carry out his benevolent intention was owing to several insuperable obstacles to the plan, but not to his lack of good-will. In the first place, the Caribs themselves strenuously objected to his scheme, and fought every assailing party with such demoniac fury that the Spaniards found it better to leave them alone than to attempt the capture of savages like these, who resisted to the death, or, if wounded and taken alive, refused to labor for their captors when carried to Spain. In the second place, Columbus found it difficult to return thither, after the founding of a settlement in Hispaniola, and far easier to declare the weak

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and inoffensive natives of that island infected with the taint of cannibalism, and thus subject to the imposition of slavery, than to direct his energies against the Caribs.

To their weak and generous natures the Indians of the larger northern islands, as Cuba, Hispaniola, and Jamaica, owed their eventual extermination; for the brutal Spaniards, though they found millions inhabiting there, in a few years swept them from the face of the earth. Las Casas, writing of conditions in his lifetime, declares that while there were, at the beginning of the Spanish invasion, nearly three millions of natives in the islands, at that time not more than two hundred remained in Hispaniola.¹

But the more vigorous and ferocious Caribs successfully repulsed every attempted invasion of their domain (including that of Ponce de Leon, which soon will be described), and maintained themselves in their strongholds until the Spaniards themselves were driven out and were succeeded by the English and French. To this invincible spirit is due their preservation as a people to-day;

¹ . . . " *Asi hay ahora en la isla Española solo doscientos personas naturales de alli, habiendo habido en el principio hasta tres millones.*"—Bishop Las Casas.

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and though only a vestige remains of that people, owing to the ravages committed by volcanic outbursts and ardent spirits, this is more than may be said of the Arawaks of the Greater Antilles.

While Ponce de Leon is sailing towards the Caribbees, wholly unaware of the warm reception awaiting him there, but (according to the historian) indulging in gratifying anticipations of an easy conquest and rich spoils, let us avail ourselves of the knowledge since gained of the Caribs and bestow upon them the attention due a little-known yet peculiar people. They came into the Caribbees (those islands which now perpetuate their tribal name) from South America, but as to their remote origin, they had a tradition to the effect that they dropped into Guiana from sky-land, through a hole in the clouds. There dwelled their great father, whom they knew as *Tamosi*, or "The Ancient One" ("The Ancient of Days"). They knew but one god, *Tamosi*, and did not believe in a spiritual hierarchy, though firmly convinced of the existence on earth of good as well as evil spirits. The former they did not regard, but the latter they sought to propitiate by gifts of game, fruits, flowers, and the feathers

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of the birds they killed with their arrows, or caught by means of bird-lime made from wild-fig juices. There were two principal spirits, they said, the chief of which was *Mabouya*, or the forest sprite, and another called *Oumekou*, which lived by the sea-shore. They took *Mabouya* with them on the hunt, and *Oumekou* when they made excursions among the islands in their war-canoes; but neither, as they admitted to the Christians, could protect them from the *ouragan*, or hurricane, which frequently devastated their country and destroyed their homes.

But for the *ouragan*, the Caribbees were like isles of paradise, replete with everything attractive to the senses, and typical of the happy land where they would dwell after life on earth had ceased, with placid streams in which to swim unwearied, and orchards of delicious fruits. They believed, with the Moslems, that the most valiant warriors would there be waited on by houris, beautiful beyond compare; and from the fact that they declared they were to be Arawak slaves, the opinion is derived that these Indians were held in high esteem.

As to their souls, they said, there were as

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many as they could feel beatings of the arteries in their bodies, besides the principal one, which was in the heart, and went to heaven with its god, who carried it thither to live with other gods. "For they do not think the soul to be so far immaterial as to be invisible; but they affirm it to be *subtile*, and of thin substance, as a purified body; and they have but the same word to signify heart and souls," notes one who visited the Caribs more than two hundred years ago.¹ And he continues, in confirmation of what has been observed by the author of this biography (who once resided with the descendants of these people): "The Caribs have an ancient and natural language, such as is peculiar to them, and also a bastard speech, with foreign words, chiefly Spanish, intermixed. Among themselves they always use the natural language, but in conversing with Christians the bastard speech. And the women [as has been mentioned] also have a different speech from the men."

"Both men and women are naturally chaste, and when those of other nations looked at them curiously, and laughed at

¹ From the *History of the Caribby Isles*. London, 1666.

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their nakedness, they were wont to say, 'You are to look on us only between the eyes.' For they go stark naked, men and women and children, and though the Christians have conversed very much among them, yet have all their persuasions to induce them to cover themselves been to no purpose. They believed they were perfectly dressed, however, if they merely changed their natural color by dyeing their bodies with *roucou*, which makes them red all over; but on great occasions they wore scarfs and girdles of feathers."

These were the Indians whom Juan Ponce was sailing to subdue—if possible to enslave—with his three ships - of - war, hundreds of soldiers, and weapons far superior to their own.

XVIII

ENCOUNTERS WITH CANNIBALS

1515

“**H**E [Juan Ponce de Leon] touched in at the ilande of Guacana, otherwyse cauled Guadalupe, and sent to lande certayne of his men with the laundresses of the shyppes; whom the canibales, lying in ambushe, assayled with their envenemed arrowes, and slaying the most parte, caryed away the women.”

Thus the translator of Martyr's great work on the New World (to whom reference is made in the previous chapter) epitomizes the adventures of Juan Ponce in the Caribbees; but a mere summary of them should not suffice. The details are to be found in fragmentary shape scattered throughout various works. Having collected the same, we will now piece them together, and, entreating the reader's forbearance, endeavor to weave a fabric—a tapestry, perchance—in

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which our hero's acts shall stand in proper relation to the time and place of their occurrence.

First, in confirmation of the statement above made, we have, for instance, that of a Spanish historian, one Andres Gonzales Barcia, who wrote, in 1723, a very valuable work on Florida, which was published under the pseudonym of "Don Gabriel de Cardenas y Cano." He applies the word "Florida" to the adjacent islands and the main, or "terra firma," and says that Juan Ponce set sail in the month of May, 1515, with three ships, armed at his own cost, for the islands in which lived the Caribs, whom he was instructed to pacify.

After a prosperous voyage, he arrived within sight of the island called by the natives Guacana, and by the Spaniards Guadalupe, where he sought and found a harbor. As he and his company had been many weeks at sea, they were sadly in need of clean clothes and fresh water for drinking, so he sent a number of laundresses ashore with an armed escort to protect them while they washed the linen in a mountain stream which rumbled noisily over the rocks on a beach within sight of the ships. The women

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spread their *ropa* on the rocks, tucked up their skirts, rolled up their sleeves, and proceeded at once to launder the linen the best they could under the circumstances. Meanwhile their escort strolled about on the beach, picking up gay-colored shells washed ashore by the waves, and in other ways "killing time," until one of them, in an evil hour, proposed that they should follow a path they had found to the native village to which it probably led. Having had no experience with the Caribs, these foolish soldiers adopted the suggestion at once, and set off through the forest, leaving the women unprotected.

Unknown to them, however, they were watched, and had they been bribed for the purpose they could not have done anything more gratifying to the savages, who were peering from the thickets along the trail. They were in overwhelming numbers, for the forest swarmed with them; every rock and every giant tree had behind it a group of naked Indians, and had the unsuspecting Spaniards been more acute, they might have seen the fierce eyes of their foes gleaming hungrily through the leaves of palms and tree-ferns. Each red-skinned savage grasped

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in one hand a bow of tough iron-wood, and in the other a clutch of arrows, barbed and tipped with feathers. At his waist hung a stone-headed battle-axe, so ponderous that when its owner walked or ran he had to balance it with the hand that held the arrows.

Every Indian had his war-paint on, his skin stained with roucou (annatto), and his face painted in lines of white and black, making him look like a two-legged tiger or cougar. The various colors blended so well with those of the flowers and leaves about them, that perhaps this was the reason that none of the savages had been seen by the Spaniards, who, still pursuing their way inland, walked directly into the trap that nature and the savages had set for them. Nature aided the Indians, we say, because the path led at first through the ravine, at the mouth of which the stream came out that ran over the beach sands into the sea. This ravine grew narrower and gloomier as it receded from the bay, and after a while the Spaniards entered a veritable tunnel, formed by the cragged rocks on either side, overarched by dense canopies of vines closely set with leaves and spangled with blossoms.

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Around and into the flowers, which hung from the canopies and trailed down the cliffs, darted topaz-throated, gold-crested humming-birds, buzzing like bumble-bees, their wings like films of mist about them, so rapid were their movements.

But the Spaniards had no eye for the beauty of the scene, for some of them, old soldiers of the Moorish wars, became suddenly alive to the dangers of a situation like this, which, except for its tropical environment, reminded them of some gloomy gorge in the mountains of Malaga or Ronda. Their leader was a veteran of many campaigns, but one of the loose-natured sort, whose dissoluteness had stood in the way of his advancement beyond the grade of sergeant. He already repented of having set out on this foray, and was about to halt his little band for consultation, when, turning about to do so, his eye was caught by a dusky figure gliding like a snake across the ravine, between the Spaniards and the beach.

"*Alerta!*" he shouted. "Be vigilant, my men, for there is an enemy behind us! Draw sword! Face about! Retreat!" The score or so of soldiers instantly comprehended

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their peril, and prepared themselves for what they knew must be a desperate encounter. For now, realizing that they had been discovered, the savages came pouring out of the forest like ants and hornets from their nests. They came swiftly, silently. Shrewd savages that they were, trained warriors in many a conflict, knowing that a tumult would bring the Spaniards from the ships out-swarming, at first they refrained from raising the war-whoop. But when the leader of the soldiers saw their retreat cut off by naked Indians, and numbers of them massing ahead, so that a living wall rose up before and behind, he gave the order to open fire with the arquebuses.

There were half a dozen muskets in the party—those primitive, clumsy matchlocks which required a large and motionless mark to be effective—and these were quickly made ready. Matches were lighted, and the musketeers advanced to the front. The wondering savages looked on in silence, only brandishing their bows and war-clubs; for they knew that the strangers were their prey, and for the moment merely played with them, as a cat with a mouse in its clutches. They did not realize the death-

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dealing powers of the arquebuses, and when at last the matches were applied to the powder-pans, and puffs of smoke rolled out, followed by flame, with a terrible noise that reverberated through the ravine, they were astounded. They thought the combined reports of the muskets were thunders from the clouds, and they looked aloft, around, in vast astonishment.

The thunder they called "God's voice," and were extremely afraid of it, for the lightning, its twin brother, sometimes slew the unwary and irreverent. But here were heaps of slain, and no sign of a storm! Here were wounded and dying, the survivors noticed, who had been struck down without any apparent cause, except—it finally dawned upon them—that cause could be traced to those strange things the Spaniards had pointed at them. They closed the great gap made by the murderous muskets in their ranks and gathered for consultation. This gave the Spaniards time to reload, and when at last the savages had reached the decision that the muskets were responsible for the slaughter, they received confirmation of it in another volley, which stretched several more lifeless upon the rocky bed of the

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ravine. Then they hesitated no longer, as a body, for the survivors were undismayed by the noise, the smoke, or the slaughter, and closed in upon the devoted band of Spaniards with deadly intent.

As there was no longer any necessity for silence, the reports of the muskets having given alarm, of course, to those on shipboard, the savages let loose most horrid yells and war-whoops as they advanced, even the wounded seeming inspired to fury and attempting to keep up with the thronging warriors. There was no time for recharging the arquebuses, and the Spaniards were obliged to meet the foe on nearly equal terms. Against arrows, spears, and war-clubs they opposed their lances, swords, and clubbed arquebuses, also being protected to some extent by their armor. Except for their steel armor, and their expertness at cutting and thrusting with the sword, the Spaniards had but small advantage over the savages, who threw themselves upon them like a thunderbolt. At first the keen-edged swords made terrible havoc in the Carib ranks, for the naked savages had nothing to protect their limbs and bodies. How they were mangled! How their blood

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flowed forth in streams that day! But they minded no wounds, however grievous, nor cared for aught except to kill a Spaniard ere they died, and so it was that the soldiers were overcome, one at a time, by mere weight of numbers, and finally the last one of that little band lay prostrate, lifeless, in the bed of the stream.

It had been hideous, ghastly work, and the surviving Caribs were excited to a fury perfectly fiendish by the time it was ended; but there remained another deed to be mentioned, compared to which the slaughter of the soldiers might be termed an act of mercy. The wretched laundresses, who had been left unprotected, flocked to the sea-side when they heard the first sounds of strife, and held out imploring arms towards the ships at anchor in the bay. Their piercing shrieks were heard by the savages ashore as well as by the people on board ship, and there was fierce rivalry as to whom should be first at the surf-line on the beach.

And what were the feelings of Juan Ponce de Leon, who, as commander of the fleet, had ordered these helpless females on shore without adequate protection? He was reclining in a hammock, on the after-castle of

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the flag-ship, when the tumult in the ravine began. His heart thumped suddenly against his ribs, then seemed to leap into his throat, as he remembered that he had been guilty of gross neglect in landing a party in an enemy's country without guarding against treachery and surprise. He leaped to the deck forthwith, and instantly trumpeted orders for the launching of boats and the arming and despatching of a rescue-party to the shore. But the movements of the sailors were slow and clumsy compared with those of the naked, fleet-footed Indians, who, immediately they heard the shrieks of the women, diverted a number of their warriors from the forest to the shore. They darted out of the woods and down the beach. Silently they ran and swiftly, swooping upon the terrified females like hawks or sea-eagles, and bearing them off upon their shoulders.

Several boats were then near the beach, each boat well laden with soldiers; but before their passengers were landed the savages had nearly reached the forest. Clad in their heavy armor, which weighted them down like lead, the soldiers feared to leap into the water, and thus much time was lost while the boats were being drawn

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up the strand. Meanwhile the hapless females were struggling in the arms of their horrid captors, realizing that the fate in store for them was far worse than immediate death; but in vain were their attempts to free themselves, their piteous pleadings, their tears, and anguished cries for help. A few of the cross-bowmen in the foremost boat knelt on the sands as soon as they struck shore, and, taking careful aim, let fly their arrows. Three of the savages were struck between the shoulders by the speeding bolts, one of them with such force that the woman he held in front of him was wounded, the arrow having gone clean through his body. But what was the horror and surprise of the on-gazing Spaniards to see these relentless cannibals, as they fell, seize their victims by the throat with their teeth, and strangle them, while in the agonies of death!

Never before had the Spaniards witnessed such animosity, such undying hate, and they crossed themselves fervently, exclaiming the while, "Santa Maria defend us from such savages as these!"

The day was then well advanced, but after the search-party had landed came Ponce de

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Leon, determined to ascertain the fate of his soldiers, even were the shades of night to fall before he found them. After stripping the fallen Spaniards of their weapons, despatching the wounded, and gathering up their own dead and injured warriors, the Caribs had retreated into the forest, where those who had kidnapped the women met the main body. Together, then, the exulting Indians departed for their stronghold in the mountain, where their wives and children were gathered, and whence they could not be dislodged were an army of ten thousand to attack them.

The shadow of the Soufrière, the great and gloomy "sulphur mountain," Guadalupe's quiescent volcano, lengthened portentously along the surface of the sea, proclaiming the near approach of night; yet would not Juan Ponce desist from his search of the ravine. Finding the trail as it led into the gorge, he followed it until, at dusk, the scene of conflict was revealed. There lay his gallant men, as they had fallen in the heat of battle, all their armor on, save that their helmets and easily detachable portions, like the greaves and gorgets, had been snatched away. The place where

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they had fallen afforded no spot for sepulture, and as it was impossible, in the gathering darkness, to carry those mail-clad corpses back to shore, and fearing an attack if he remained there, Juan Ponce ordered a retreat. The yells of the retreating Indians could be heard afar off in the forest; but this fact was no guarantee that there were not hundreds still remaining, and the commander acted with commendable prudence in deferring the burial of his slain until the succeeding day.

"But we shall not find them here tomorrow, commander," said a veteran of his company, who had fought the savages of Terra Firma, under Ojeda and Balboa.

"And why not?" demanded Juan Ponce. "Faith, the stream they have fallen in is not strong enough to bear them away, and if it were we should find them at the river's mouth." He was raging inwardly, his heart sore with vexation over the loss of his men and the terrible fate of the women; but he strove to be calm, and was patient with the soldier.

"Why? Because," rejoined the veteran, "the cannibal pagans will return to get them. While they have the poisoned arrow

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in these islands, these savages have not used it here, and that is proof that they intend to sacrifice and eat our comrades. They will take and roast them in their armor, as we were wont to roast the armadillos on Terra Firma coast!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Juan Ponce, horrified, and undecided what his course should be. But whatever was in store for the dead, he knew it was impossible then to rescue them. He and his men made their way back to the beach and the ships; but in the morning, when he returned to the ravine for the purpose of paying the last honors to his braves, there was no vestige of them there!

XIX

DEFEATED BY CARIBS

1515-1516

BY reason whereof [the difficulty of conquering the Caribs] Johannes Pontius, beinge greatly discomfyted, durste not invade ye Canibales, fearynge their envenomed arrowes, which those naked man-hunters can direct most certenly. Thus good Pontius, fayling of his purpose, was fayne to gyve over the Canibales, whom (beinge safe and under his owne house roofe) he had threatened to vanquishe and destroy."

Though it might be inferred from the remarks of Eden the translator, quoted in the preceding paragraph, that Juan Ponce was both vainglorious and cowardly, because he "durst not" invade the cannibal island, the inhabitants of which he had threatened to "vanquish and destroy," yet a close examination of his conduct on this occasion does not seem to warrant this denunciation.

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He had undertaken a task which he found impossible of execution, and eventually abandoned the conquest of the Caribs, on account of the insufficient force at his command, and lack of incentive. In other words, while he desired to capture as many cannibals as possible, for the purpose of enslaving them, he soon became convinced that, provided he could do so—and the prospect was not encouraging—they would be surly, unmanageable, and possible incitors of insurrections among the other Indians. Again, he had pretty well settled in his mind that the islands contained no gold or precious stones, while the immediate spoil of these naked savages, who lived in wretched huts of straw and palm-leaves, was not worth, all told, a thousand maravedis.

Now, Juan Ponce, as we know, was mercenary; he was not overburdened with scruples as to the rights of the Indians; though in his old age he was not so sanguinary as in youth and middle life. He would like to enslave and despoil the Caribs, provided the “game were worth the candle”; but most evidently it was not. Hence his readiness to relinquish the conquest, and his desire to return to peaceful Boriquen. But there

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were the women captured by the Caribs, whose fate might be inferred, though not certainly known. He could not, in all honor, abandon them to the cannibals without at least the pretence of a search and attempted rescue. Also, he was in honor, and by inclination, bound to give his slain soldiers Christian burial, and at daylight of the morning following the fight in the ravine he might have been seen leading a body of well-armed veterans up the beach and over the river-bed.

He arrived at the scene of slaughter only to find (as we have said already) no trace of soldier or warrior, living or dead. Amazed, stupefied, he removed his helmet and looked around, as if to ask the rocks, the overhanging trees, the silver stream that rippled through the gorge, what had become of the men who had been left there lifeless, lying, as they had fallen, in their weighty armor. There was no reply from the insensate objects around, nor were there any evidences of human beings in the forest; though there may have been sharp eyes watching every movement of the Spaniards, as, dejected and discomfited, they once again retraced to the shore of the bay.

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An exclamation of surprise broke from Juan Ponce, when, having reached the beach, he chanced to look towards the fleet out in the bay, and saw four vessels lying there at anchor, showing there had been a new arrival. It was a caravel, or large sloop, and flew his colors at the mast-head, indicating thereby that it had come from Boriquen. Though not wholly unexpected, since Juan Ponce himself had sent orders for the caravel to meet him in this bay, it came as a surprise, and served for the moment to divert his mind from the grievous troubles that afflicted him. Soon after reaching the deck of his flag-ship, Juan Ponce received a visit from the captain of the caravel, who came to report that he had brought a reinforcement of veteran soldiers from the island, together with a supply of ammunition and provisions.

"But these are not all," he said to the commander, with the air of one who has a pleasant surprise to communicate. "Reinforcements have I, powder as well, and food. I also bring good tidings from the señora, your excellent lady, and your children; but still more: I have with me the hound Becerrico, your excellency. See, there he stands, with

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his fore-feet upon the rail, awaiting only permission from you to come hither."

"And that he shall have," cried the delighted old soldier, blowing a silver whistle that hung from a chain around his neck. On hearing the sound, overboard sprang Becerrico at once, and swam lustily for the flag-ship, arrived at which he was assisted on board by the sailors, and then made his way to the deck and his master.

"Ah, Becerrico!" exclaimed Juan Ponce, as the dog leaped upon him and placed his paws on his shoulders. "Thou hast come in good time, for I need thee to trail the savages that have stolen our women. Into the mountains thou goest, soon as rested and fed, for time is most precious. With thee, now, we shall be invincible, for thou art a host in thyself."

Becerrico must have understood what his master told him, for he threw back his head and emitted from his cavernous throat a roar that shook the echoes of the mountains loose from their hiding-places. Then he obediently went to the galley, where the cook fed him bountifully, and after his meal came back and stood at "attention," as if to signify that he was ready for business, of whatever sort.

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Giving him in charge of his steward, Juan Ponce cautioned the man to beware lest the Indians surprise him, but to seek out a fresh trail, and let Becerrico pursue it into the mountains, or wherever it might take him. Once on the scent of the savages, he would never desist from the hunt until they had been run down, captured, or killed. Accompanied by a strong escort, the steward went ashore with the hound, whither he was followed within an hour by Ponce de Leon and two hundred men. Most of them were musketeers, some were cross-bowmen, some armed only with sword or lance; but all were well equipped, and burning to revenge their comrades slain the day before.

Through the dense woods bordering the beach ran several trails, and it was Juan Ponce's plan to station a body of men at the mouth of each trail, so that if the hound should start any quarry he might capture it, perhaps. That is, considering the Indian trails (through a forest so dense that one could not penetrate it without cutting his way) as "runways," like those used by deer, he concluded that the savages, when started in the mountains by the hound, would certainly use them in attempting to

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make their escape. And the sequel proved him to have been in the right.

A long time elapsed after Becerrico had been shown the Indian runways and given the scent of the warriors who had kidnapped the women. At first he ranged up and down the shore, his head high in the air, then he selected one of the trails, and, plunging into the forest, was lost to sight. Two or three hours went by, and the patient soldiers ambushing the runways were almost asleep when, faint and far away, boomed down from the mountains the cry of the hound.

"Ha, listen!" exclaimed Juan Ponce, eagerly, addressing a member of his staff. "That is Becerrico, and when he gives that cry he means to say the quarry is in sight and on the run. Light the fusees, gentlemen, and pass the word along; have every musket ready, for soon there will be something to do."

Never had Juan Ponce spoken truer words, for there was straightway much to do, though not exactly of the nature he had anticipated. He had thought to make great slaughter of the Caribs when they should appear on shore, after having been run out of their strongholds by the blood-hound; and

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so he did; but first they placed his command in great peril by neatly turning his flank and getting between him and the sea. How it was, he could never explain—or, what is nearer the truth, never cared to speak of the subject, it was so mortifying to his pride. But while the soldiers were intently watching the runways, a multitude of Caribs in canoes suddenly swept around a promontory, darted in between his vessels and the beach—and there they were, to all appearances masters of the situation.

Almost simultaneously the refugees came pouring out of the forest runways, and thus Juan Ponce and his soldiers were hemmed in between two bodies of savages, the numbers of those in the forest constantly augmenting. It needed but a glance for the outwitted commander to perceive that the strategy of the Caribs exceeded his own—at least in this instance, and he paled with rage and vexation. There was not an instant to lose, however, if he would extricate his command from the trap which the savages had so cleverly sprung upon him, and he ordered the trumpet to sound the recall.

“In phalanx, march!” he shouted, having collected the scattered soldiers. “To the

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boats!" was the next command; and the soldiers needed no urging, for the strand was now almost alive with raging savages, seeking an opportunity for plying their weapons with most deadly effect. They poured forth from the runways, they scampered wildly across the sands, yelping and howling like wild beasts; but they were daunted by that shining wall of steel which, without break or gap, moved steadily towards the boats at the water's edge.

In their haste to take part in the action, the Caribs had neglected to cut off the boats from the vessels and kill their crews, having landed from their canoes in a curve of the shore which hid them from their sight. They now tried to make amends for their omission by detaching bands of skirmishers for the purpose; but were too late. Flinging out the sides of the phalanx like wings to the main body, Commander Ponce effectually protected the line of boats, the sturdy sailors in which had gallantly held their posts, despite the threatened attack by the Caribs.

But how to get the soldiers aboard was a problem for the commander to solve, and solve without delay, too, if he desired to save

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their lives and his honor. For both, of course, he was extremely solicitous, since his soldiers were as dear to him as his children; and to the latter, he now felt, he had only honor to leave, since all else seemed lost. His own life was as nothing to him in comparison with the conquest he had hoped to achieve; but he could not engage the savages single-handed. If there had been some head, or chief, visible and prominent, he would not have hesitated to challenge him to mortal combat; but there was none. The real leader of the Caribs, the chief, cacique, or king—by whatever title he was known—had remained invisible, but his intelligence was apparent in the strategy by which the Caribs had gained such an advantage over their opponents.

The savages hovered at a little distance on the sands, in a semicircle concentric to the Spanish line, waiting—but eagerly and hungrily watching—for the foe to embark. As soon they realized, when that steel-faced phalanx began to back up and make for the boats, those of the soldiers who remained on shore would be exposed to their attack, so they waited for the opportune moment. A boatload of soldiers went off, and another; though

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there seemed to be no diminution in numbers—or, at least, no gap appeared in the ranks; but soon after the boats arrived at the flag-ship something extraordinary happened. That is, it seemed extraordinary to the savages, but not to Commander Juan Ponce, who was pacing the sands within the wall of steel that stood between him and the foe. He was anxiously expecting it, for he had sent the captain of the ship a note to this effect: "*En nombre de Dios* [In the name of God] open at once with your larboard batteries upon the savages behind us, else we cannot embark! Double-shot the lombards, and aim high, in order to clear us. But at once, at once! Our lives are in peril.—ADELANTADO."

And this is what happened: while the savages (their eyes so blinded by passion that they did not note the arquebusiers charging their muskets and lighting the fusees) yelled and danced in rage over the escape of the two boats laden with soldiers, a smoke-puff from the flag-ship was followed by a brace of iron missiles that cut a wide swath in their ranks. As the survivors gazed in amaze at the mangled dead and wounded in their midst, another puff, followed by another brace of

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projectiles, laid more of them low. At this moment the musketeers in the front rank of the phalanx fired a startling volley, and the panic of the Caribs was complete. They were literally shocked into affright, and were so terror-stricken that they fled without even snatching up their dead, which strewed the sands by scores.

The soldiers leaped forward with shouts, and in the heat of conflict would have pursued the savages into the forest; but a stern command from Juan Ponce halted them. He forbade them to leave the shore, and, moreover, was so urgent in his haste to depart from "this country accursed of the devil," as he termed it, that soon all the soldiers were afloat and safely away for the ships. Juan Ponce was the last to leave the strand, and, as his boat rapidly neared the flag-ship, was congratulating himself upon so easily escaping from the snare set by his enemies, when a babel of sounds came to his ears from the forest. Cries of distress and howls of rage were mingled with the baying of the hound, at hearing which Juan Ponce clutched the boat's rail nervously, exclaiming: "Becerrico! Becerrico! To think that I should have forgotten thee! Back, men, back to the

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shore!" he shouted to the rowers and the steersman. "Save the hound we must, even though we risk our lives to do so."

As the boat's bow swung around, there burst from the forest a naked Indian warrior, who made for the water with long strides, and Becerrico close behind him in full cry. Into the sea plunged the Carib, instantly followed by the hound, who was equally swift in the water as on land. The distance between the two was not great, and was being lessened so rapidly that the watchers in the boat and on the vessels expected to see Becerrico spring upon and throttle the savage in another moment, when the latter turned swiftly and raised himself half out of the water. In one hand he still held his bow, in the other a clutch of arrows, and while treading water, to keep himself erect, he placed an arrow on the string, and shot it with tremendous force into Becerrico's throat. The brave hound gasped, his life-blood stained the wave; but still he kept on, though with feebler and feebler strokes, until abreast the enemy, though then too weak to do him harm. The deadly poison with which the arrow was tipped did its work well and quickly. With a gesture of contempt, the

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hardy savage turned for the shore, gaining which he sped up the sands, and with a yell of defiance disappeared in the gloom of the forest.

XX

JUAN PONCE'S LAST CAMPAIGN

1521

“**W**ITH this evyl begynnynge Iohn Ponce departed from hence to Boriquen, and from thence to Florida, where he wente alande with his souldiers, to espye a place moste commodious to inhabite and plante a colonie. But the Indians comynge forthe againste hym, assayled the Spanyardes fiercely, and slewe and wounded many of them.

“At which conflicte also he hymselfe beinge wounded with an arrowe, dyed shortly after, in the ilande of Cuba; and so endynge hys lyfe, consumed a great parte of the rychesse he had before begotten at Saynt Johannes of Boriquen.”¹

“Juan Ponce had not been as wary as usual,” says Washington Irving, with reference to the defeat at Guadalupe, “or he

¹ Eden's rendering of Martyr's chronicle.

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had to deal with savages unusually adroit in warfare. . . . This blow, at the very outset of this vaunted expedition, sank deep into his heart, and put an end to all his military excitement. Humbled and mortified, he set sail for the island of Porto Rico, where he relinquished all further prosecution of the enterprise, under pretext of ill health, and gave command of the squadron to a captain named Zuniga. But it is surmised that his malady was not so much of the flesh as of the spirit. He remained in Porto Rico as governor; but having grown testy and irritable, through vexations and disappointments, he gave great offence and caused much contention on the island by positive and strong-handed measures in respect to the distribution of the Indians."

That the dispirited commander of the squadron sailed away from Guadalupe most reluctantly, we may reasonably suppose, for he left there, never to be seen again by men of his race, the soldiers needlessly sacrificed in the ravine, the women who had been kidnapped by the cannibals, and his precious blood-hound Becerrico. Most of them all, probably (if the truth were told), he lamented gallant Becerrico, who had given his life to

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save his master's reputation, and died game at the very last. His body was not recovered, having sunk almost as soon as the savage he was pursuing swam ashore, and probably became food for sharks, as great numbers of them gathered about the scene of strife.

The bay in which the fleet was anchored while this futile attempt was made to subjugate the Caribs, lies between two headlands on the southern coast of Guadalupe. Into it run the combined waters of three streams—the "Trois Rivières" of the present-day French, who occupy the island. On the left bank of the central stream, overshadowed by tree-ferns and wild plantains, may be seen some primitive rock carvings, or petroglyphs, which mark the site of Carib settlements.

Having Ponce de Leon's distressing experience in mind, the Spaniards left the Caribs to themselves for many years; but finally the forces of Spain, France, and England, severally and at various times used against the natives, effected their practical extermination, and no Indian of their tribe lives in the island now.

The nearest settlement of Caribs descended from those we have described, reside in Dominica, another insular gem of the Carib-

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bees, fifty miles from Guadalupe. Farther down the chain, in the island of St. Vincent, a few more may be found—survivors of the volcanic eruption of 1902, when their settlement was destroyed and many Indians lost their lives. The present descendants of the brave Caribs, the only Indians who successfully resisted the murderous Spaniards in the West Indies, are but two or three hundred in number, and dwell in the two islands mentioned, Dominica and St. Vincent.

There is no trace of their ancestors' rivals and enemies, the Arawaks, in any island of the Caribbean Sea, respecting the extermination of whom an Italian, writing in 1560, says: "The natives, finding themselves intolerably oppressed, and with no chance of regaining their liberty, with sighs and tears longed for death. Therefore, they went into the woods and hanged themselves, after having killed their children, saying it was far better to die than to live so miserably, serving such and so many ferocious tyrants and wicked thieves. Finally, out of the two million of original inhabitants, through the number of suicides and other deaths, occasioned by the oppressive labors and cruelties imposed by the Spaniards, there are not

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now [1560], one hundred and fifty to be found. And this has been their way of making Christians of them.

“What befell those poor islanders has happened also to all the others, in Cuba, Jamaica, and Porto Rico. And although an almost infinite number of Indians from the mainland have been brought to these islands, nearly all have perished. In short, I may say that wherever the Spaniards have unfurled their banner they have, by their great cruelties, inspired the inhabitants with perpetual hatred.”

Ponce de Leon was commissioned not only to conquer the Indians of the islands, but also those of the Terra Firma coast, now called the Spanish Main; but having been so lacking of success at the outset, he retired to Porto Rico—as we have seen—and thence sent Captain Zuniga in his place. This commander left no record of his achievements; but a slave-hunter who went over his route about twenty years later tells the tale with brutal frankness. “All along the coast,” he says, “the Indians came down from the hills to fish; therefore we used to land and hide ourselves, often waiting all day, and on the Indians arriving we jumped out, like so

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many wolves attacking so many lambs, and made them our slaves. In this way we caught upward of fifty, the greater part women with little children. . . .

“While we were on the coast, a Spaniard, Captain Pedro de Calice, arrived with upward of four thousand slaves; and he had captured as many more, but, from famine and fatigue, they had died on the journey. And when some of them could not walk, the Spaniards, to prevent them from remaining behind to make war, killed them by burying their swords in their sides or breasts.

“It was really a most distressing thing to see the way in which these wretched creatures, naked, tired, and lame, were treated, exhausted as they were with hunger, sick and despairing. The unfortunate mothers, with two or three children on their shoulders or clinging around their necks, overwhelmed with tears and grief, were all tied with cords or with chains round their necks and arms. This captain had gone seven hundred miles into the country inland, which when the Spaniards first went there was full of people, but now was nearly depopulated.”

The best we can say of Juan Ponce is that he was not the worst of that class of cut-

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throats denominated "conquistadores," or conquerors, but really entitled to be called robbers, kidnappers, and murderers. We can hardly sympathize with him in his grief over the disaster at Guadalupe, since it was mortified pride, and not contrition for his sins, that cast him into gloom. He retired to his castle at San Juan, and during a period of nearly or quite five years made it his headquarters, though occasionally visiting other parts of Porto Rico.

He thus remained, says one who wrote of his voyages, "in a state of growling repose," until the discovery of Mexico by Cordova, the further exploration of its coast by Grijalva, and its invasion by Hernando Cortés aroused him from the seeming lethargy into which he had fallen.

When tidings of the first expedition, along the coast of Yucatan, was brought him, the old lion of Boriquen merely regarded the messenger drowsily; at the news that Grijalva had returned to Cuba with quantities of gold, he yawned, but sat up and took notice; when, however, he was told of what Cortés had done: of the armies he had met and vanquished, the vast treasure he had wrested from Montezuma, and already

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shipped to Spain, he roused himself to action.

The Florida which he had discovered was not, then, an island, after all, but a continent; and that base-born Hernando Cortés had invaded it. He had penetrated beyond the coast—as he himself should have done, instead of retreating before a paltry band of Indians; and he had sent home to Spain a treasure-ship, through the very channel he had found when searching for the fountain of Bimini.

Once again the Casa Blanca was a scene of preparation for an expedition, and the harbor of San Juan resounded with the sounds of labor, as vessels were careened, seams opened by the heat of the sun in decks and sides were calked, and booms and topmasts fitted. Shortly after, on a day in 1521, two ships sailed out of San Juan harbor, the equipping and manning of which had taken the bulk of that fortune which Juan Ponce, as conqueror and as governor, had wrung from the wretched natives of Boriquen.¹ He was taking leave of the

¹ “*Juan Ponce de Leon, Adelantado de Bimini, que avia estado retirado desde el mal suceso de Guadalupe, en su casa en la isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico, ò*

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island forever—though he had no premonition of the event which, in a few months, was to deprive his family of its protector and the island of its governor. Again, from the battlements, Doña Inez and her children waved him farewell, and, after watching the vessels sail into the horizon, returned to their dreary, uneventful existence in the castle.

Governor Ponce's voyage through the Bahamas was the roughest, stormiest, that he had ever undertaken, and the sufferings of his crews were great. But they were no longer sailing an unknown sea, and, notwithstanding contrary winds and baffling currents, eventually the coast of Florida was sighted. Had the natives of Florida been informed of his coming, they could not have been more alert and aggressive, for scarcely had a port been found and a boat-load of fighting-men disembarked, than they were upon them, with pointed reminders, in the shape of darts and arrows, that their presence was not wanted.

It seemed fated that Ponce de Leon should never penetrate the region he had found,

Boriquen, bolvio a Florida a certificarse mas de que era tierra firme, con dos navios bien armados."—Barcia, *Ensayo Cronologico*, 1723.

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nor more than set foot on shore, for no sooner had he landed than the savages came down with overwhelming force. Caught at a decided disadvantage, with half his men still afloat and the others unprepared for conflict with a large body of the enemy, yet the gallant veteran led the soldiers against the savages with his old-time valor and energy.

Making his way to the fore-front, he shouted, waving his sword: "Santiago! Santiago! Good St. James is with us, men. Now at them!" In the fore-front of battle he stood, urging his soldiers to come up and close in an attack, and, while thus exposed (though sheathed in armor from throat to toe), he was struck in the thigh by an arrow and fell to the sands.

The battle did not rage long after that, for the men had no heart to fight after their leader was struck, and made his disability a pretext for retreating to the ships. They had a very good excuse for retiring, inasmuch as many had been killed before the wounding of their commander-in-chief, and many more were wounded. Those nearest to Ponce de Leon, when he fell, seized and bore him on board ship, where, after an inspection of the wound, it was decided to set sail for Cuba, in

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the hope of securing competent surgical aid at Havana.

The stragglers were recalled by trumpet, at the sound of which the savage Floridians hurried to the strand by hundreds and mocked the discomfited Spaniards as they hoisted sail and bore away. They left a host of scoffing Indians on the shore, hearing the gibes of whom, and learning that they had shown no mercy to such as had fallen into their hands, the wounded veteran would fain have sallied forth again. He called for his armor, of which his attendants had stripped him, and for his sword; but at the first venture he fell fainting to the deck. Before the Cuban shores were sighted, it was evident to all that Juan Ponce de Leon had received a mortal hurt. Like the gallant Cordova, who four years before had returned to Havana from Yucatan by way of Florida, and had been wounded by those same savages, Juan Ponce was death-struck ere he reached the shore. Havana harbor was at last made, however; he was taken to land and given every attention; but in vain. After a few days of painful lingering, during his conscious intervals in which he calmly gave orders for the disposition of his body and effects, he was

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carried off, either by a fever resulting from the wound, or by the poison in which, it was thought, the arrow had been dipped.

While many followers of Juan Ponce de Leon had lost their lives in the battle that brought him his mortal injury, and many more were seriously wounded, yet personal mention is made only of the commander, who, having most to gain by a victory, had also most to lose by defeat. Still, less is known of his last hours than we could wish, and no account exists by any one who was present at his death-bed; though we know that he was tenderly cared for to the last, and at his death was mourned by all who knew him as a valiant and honorable cavalier.

His remains were taken on board the flagship, with all the honors of war, and from the harbor of Havana the little fleet sailed into the open channel between Cuba and Florida. Thence the Bahama archipelago was entered, and through that sea, which Juan Ponce de Leon was the first to navigate in its entire extent, was borne the body of him who sought therein the isle and fountain of eternal youth. Back to Boriquen they bore him, and at the castle, Casa Blanca, he

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was received by the weeping Doña Inez and her children.

They gave him sepulture at first within the castle, but eventually his ashes were deposited beneath the high altar of the Dominican church in San Juan de Puerto Rico. Removed from that sanctuary in 1863, after having been religiously preserved for more than three hundred years, these sacred relics were for a while unsepultured; but at last, after the American invasion of Porto Rico, were placed beneath a monument erected in memory of him who was "a lion by name and a lion by nature."

Upon his original tomb, says Barcia, quoting Herrera, was carved an epitaph in Latin, which is paraphrased as follows in Spanish:

*"Aqueste lugar estrecho
Es sepulcro del varon
Que en el nombre fue Leon,
Y mucho mas en el hecho."*

"This narrow grave contains the remains of a man who was a Lion by name, and much more by his nature," or deeds.

Juan Ponce de Leon left two sons, one of whom, Don Luis, was made an adelantado

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by Charles V., in recognition of his father's services; and a daughter Isabel, who was afterwards married to one Antonio de Gama, a licentiate of Porto Rico. In the year 1553 the wife of a Ponce de Leon perished at sea off the coast of Mexico, and so late as 1566 Porto Rico boasted of an alcalde named Juan Ponce de Leon.

"It was a noble name," says the historian Oviedo, "that of the adelantado Juan Ponce de Leon, who in truth was an honorable cavalier, a noble person, who labored hard in the conquest and pacification of Isla Española, Higüey, and the Isle of St. John."

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